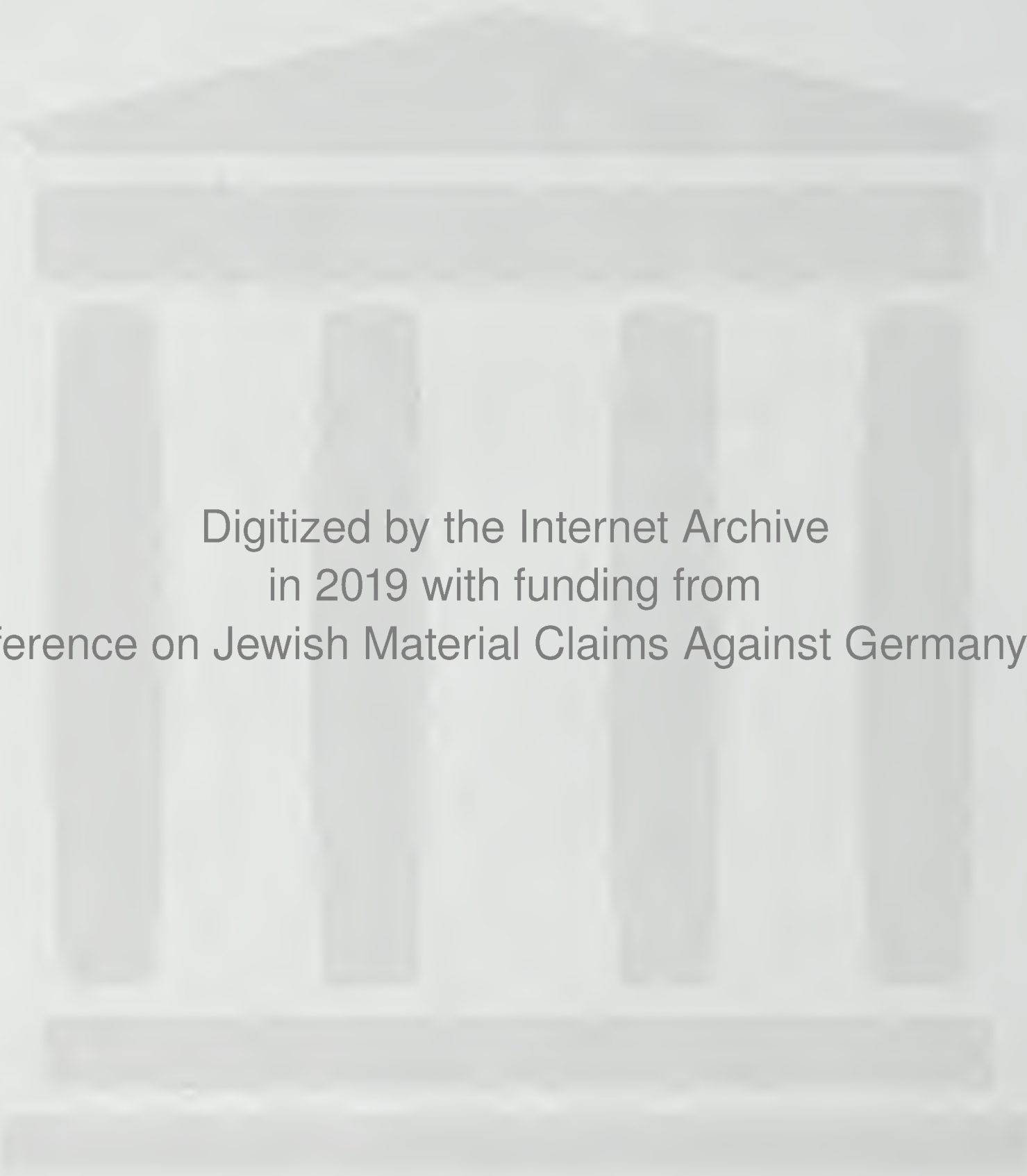


ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Library respects the copyright and intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection. The Library holds the rights and permissions to put this material online. If you hold an active copyright to this work and would like to have your materials removed from the web please contact the USHMM Library by phone at 202-479-9717, or by email at digital_library@ushmm.org.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Inc.

<https://archive.org/details/icamebackholocau01gree>

I CAME BACK

A Holocaust Survival Story

By Agnes Greenfeld

10
10
H93
G. 1
2003

JOHANNES

A Holocaust Survival Story

By Arthur Greenfield

I dedicate this memoir in memory of my parents,
Anna(1901-1944) and Izidor(1900-1944) Kupferstein,
my sister,Eva(1929-1944) and my brother,Otto(1930-1944)
who perished in Auschwitz.

In honor of my children and grandchildren:

Ronald and Rena Greenfeld,

Yaakov Zev

Menachem Yisroel

Aryeh Leib

Bracha Ester.

Audrey and Jeffrey Sussman,

Amanda(Chava Rochel)

Cover designed by: Aryeh Greenfeld.

PROLOGUE.

For many years after our liberation from the death camps of Nazi Germany, those of us who survived did not want to talk about our horrible experiences. We wanted to forget, and we also saw that people were bored, uninterested with our stories. Many of us would have liked to keep it a secret that we had been in a concentration camp, because people thought if we were treated as subhumans, we must have become so. So we kept silent. On my sixty-fifth birthday, thoughts began to bother me that I will leave this world without having told the story of my survival. I wanted my children and grandchildren and their future generations to know their roots, to know where they come from, and to know how I survived the Holocaust. But how do I start writing my memoir? How do I describe the indescribable, in English, a language which is not my native tongue, a language which I don't fully command? I needed help. I was very fortunate to find the help of my daughter-in-law, Rena. She realized how important this memoir was to

me and patiently worked with me countless hours, correcting the grammar and spelling mistakes and the "not English" sounding sentences, which reappeared time and again. It took us a long time to finish this project, while Rena had to take time out to have her four precious babies.

Thank you Rena, for your patience, your understanding and your interest in my past. I could not have accomplished this memoir without your help! And thank you Rony for letting Rena, your wife, spend so much time with me.

I also want to thank Audrey, and her husband, Jeff, for giving me their computer. It was a great help for me. It is appreciated a lot.

For my grandchildren (in chronological order) Yaakov Zev, Menachem, Amanda, Aryeh and Bracha, I want to thank them for their help with the typing and for their interest in my story.

Above all, I give thanks to the Almighty for letting me come back, letting me find Tuli, my husband, and for giving me and Tuli our wonderful family.

Agnes Greenfeld.

It is May 8, 1945.

I am a prisoner in a German slave labor camp for Jewish girls, close to the small town of Bad-Kudova. It is about 10 o'clock in the morning and we are called for "Chale Appel" (Roll Call). This is not the ordinary routine since we already stood for "Chale Appel" earlier at 4 o'clock, just as we had every morning from the day we were deported to Auschwitz. We already received the bowl of black coffee and our ration of bread for the day, which by now most of us had eaten. It is a beautiful spring morning. The air is mild; the sun is illuminating the perfectly blue sky above us. But for me, for us, the world is dark. Although rumors had been circulating in the last few days that Hitler had committed suicide, that the war is coming to an end, and that one by one the guards, after changing to civilian clothes, left the camp during the nights, I am unable to hope anymore that this slavery could ever end, that I could ever be free. I am constantly, painfully hungry. Hunger has taken over all my thoughts, my mind. Freedom, life without hunger has become unfamiliar to me. I tell myself: The war will be over but, the Germans will never let us go. They will keep us here to work for

them forever. They won't have to account for us to anyone because there is no one left alive who would look for us. We will stay here until we die from starvation.

The Lager Elteste, a Jewish girl, who was in charge of us, counts us and then she calls the Kommandant. The Kommandant is a German woman, one of the high officers of the Lager. Other times, she would count us again, as it was the regiment every morning and every evening. Today she starts talking to us. During the next few minutes I find myself listening to her telling us that the war is over, that soon the gates will be open and we will be free to leave.

I understand the words. German was one of the foreign languages required to be studied in the Gymnasium, the school I used to attend in my hometown, Nyiregyhaza, in Hungary. But I cannot believe what I am hearing. This German woman, dressed in the dreaded SS uniform which was for Jews the symbol of the most powerful, invincible evil, and unimaginable horror and sufferings, announces the end of the Germans' most horrible atrocities with only a few simple word. She simply announces that we are free, as if nothing dreadful had happened, as if we could each go home and pick up our life as we left it.

The Kommandant continues: "March to the kitchen barrack, and the bread and leftover staples will be distributed among you." This is the instant when I realize: I survived the Lager!

Do we start singing, celebrating, jumping for joy? Do we storm the kitchen in our excruciating hunger? In our deep hatred of the Germans for our sufferings, for their atrocities, do we try to attack the Kommandant? No, we do none of this. We are too broken, and indoctrinated with the might of the SS (Nazis) to do such things. In somber and orderly fashion we line up in front of the kitchen. Each of us is given a whole bread. My bowl is filled with sugar and some type of shortening. I take my spoon and quickly mix it into a delicious cream, then start licking it with my finger. I lick it very slowly. I want this sweet delicacy to last for a long time.

We don't go back to the barracks anymore. Our precious and only belongings, our soup bowl and our spoon, we carried with us all the time. I learned to guard these very carefully; my life depended on it.

We leave the camp in formation, five in a row, the manner which had become our way of life from the moment we arrived in Auschwitz. As we are marching through the gates to freedom, licking the sweet cream off my fingers is what makes me happy.

Today I feel a need, an obligation, to be among those who bear witness to, how our people and my family suffered and died during the Nazi terror. As I am getting older I realize more and more how fast the years are passing by. Soon all who survived the horrors of the Nazis will be gone. There won't be eyewitnesses left who can teach our children, and their children, firsthand, about this terribly dark period of our Jewish history. I feel we must pass on to this and future generations how one mad man, Hitler, with his collaborators, devised the "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem". How they took it upon themselves to exterminate all European Jewry, to make them disappear forever from the face of this earth. In the Nazis' mad determination that not one drop of Jewish blood should survive, Christians, who never knew, or had long ago rejected that one of their ancestors - a grandparent, a great-grandparent or even further back in the generations - was Jewish, and had either converted to Christianity or were born of mixed marriages, were now considered to be Jews, and were persecuted. We felt World War II was waged by Hitler for one reason: To annihilate the Jews of Europe.

European Jewry shared a common fate starting with oppressive laws, later being driven out of their homes, and

culminating in deportations, tortures and killings. But the circumstances under which we were tortured and whether we survived or not depended on the measure of luck each of us had. I feel I was one of the "luckier" ones, if I can use this word.

I believe that if our grandchildren and their succeeding generations learn about the Holocaust from the words of their own grandparents it will be very real to them, more so than if they read it in history books. They will hear about the Holocaust from an ancestor, who was there, who experienced it and who survived it by mere luck, came back, and was able to tell about it.

I shall attempt to find words which would adequately describe our misery, our despair. How it is to be mentally tormented by living with constant absolute terror of unimaginable torture, and fear for our lives and for the lives of our families day after day, every hour, every minute of our existence. But will I find the words and are there adequate words in the human language to describe all this, and what it was like to be in Auschwitz?

Auschwitz was a place set up by the Nazi German government to torture and systematically kill human beings. People - the majority of them Jews - were worked and starved to death. Millions of Jews were killed by means of modern technology. They were gassed in gas-chambers, hundreds at a time. Their

bodies burned in specially set up ovens. They disappeared without a trace, in the flames and ashes.

Auschwitz was a place where the SS selected the most brutal individuals from their victims - Jews and non-Jews alike - and put them in command over their fellow prisoners. And so the SS created a system where the prisoners with power performed their jobs with the most inhumane cruelty and brutality. (There were some exceptions.)

Auschwitz was Hell on this Earth.

In the first few hours in Auschwitz, we were transformed into subhuman beings. We became "Haftlings", -strange creatures- who stopped thinking the human way or stopped thinking altogether.

No matter how much is written about it by those who survived, the rest of the world will never really comprehend the life in Auschwitz.

For the memory of my parents, younger sister and brother, who perished in Auschwitz, I shall try in a small measure to contribute so that the Holocaust will not be forgotten, fade away in the past, or worse still, be denied that it ever happened.

CHAPTER ONE.

The school year of 1943-44 was especially difficult and demanding for me. This was my senior year (the last year of my studies) in the Gymnasium. I was to graduate and receive my diploma in May, 1944 and with that, my goal would be accomplished. I had entered the Gymnasium eight years earlier, when I was ten years old, after finishing four years in a Jewish elementary school. In the Gymnasium, an Evangelist public school for girls, classes were conducted six days a week, including Saturday. Since we were religious Jews, my parents did not want me to attend school on Saturday. So my father, with his close friend Mr. Schreiber, whose daughter Edith was a classmate of mine, hired a private tutor. Edith and I were enrolled in the school as special students but instead of attending classes, we studied daily with our tutor, who also prepared us for the year-end exams which we had to take in order to be promoted to the next grade. The exams were very difficult; three or four questions from each

subject determined our grades. It became an obsession with me to know the textbook by heart, page by page, line by line. And then I prayed: "Dear G-d help me not to be asked the one question I might not remember."

This manner of private study was extremely stressful for me. All the more so because Edith was not only one of the prettiest girls in our town, she was also exceptionally intelligent and a brilliant student. For her, study meant joy and pleasure, while for me it meant extremely hard work. I couldn't keep up with her beauty, but I wanted and did keep my grades up to hers. Then I wrote in my diary: "Everything that comes so easily for Edith is so difficult for me."

The year of the graduation brought two exams for us: The one on April 1st determined whether we had passed the eighth grade and would be eligible to take the graduation exam, and the second in May, the graduation exam itself. I studied day and night. My whole life revolved around school. It filled every moment of my life. Although I was looking forward to this hard work ending soon, I also had very strong and mixed emotions about the prospect of my studies concluding, my life as a student coming to an end. A chapter of my life was closing. My education was not for the purpose of pursuing a career. Education for Orthodox Jewish girls

was purely for education itself. The summer will be nice, relaxing, but come fall and what then? What am I going to do with all my free time? Since I was studying privately, my only close friend was Edith who was planning to leave for Budapest to attend one of the Universities. I was afraid that a very boring part of my life was now ahead of me.

I was almost eighteen, not yet out of my teens. My mind, my whole being was filled with so much emotion. I was so preoccupied with my own world - my studies, my private thoughts. My dreams, and worries were the usual ones of a young girl of my age. I used to day-dream about getting married when I am seventeen just like my cousin Ilonka, but here I was, almost eighteen, and had not even had one date yet. So although I was aware of the steadily worsening Jewish situation, it was not my first concern. I left this worry to the adult world.

For years now, Hitler's terror reigned in Europe. As he marched his victorious troops into one country after the other, the fate of the Jews in those countries became doomed. With the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, and the German Army invading Poland on September 1, 1939, this terror came horrifyingly close to Hungary. However, since Hitler had considered Hungary his ally, he did not yet feel the need to occupy it. So, the

Hungarian Jews, although in fear, and under some restrictive anti-Semitic laws, continued to live more or less, a normal life.

In the winter of 1942, the great Russian offensive changed the course of the war. The Germans started to suffer defeats both on the Eastern front from the Red Army and on the West from the Allied forces. When the Allies reached southern and central Italy, their planes were able, in a very short time, to fly over Hungary and drop their bombs. Hitler, then feeling threatened that Hungary, in an attempt to save itself, might become neutral or would join forces with the Allies, deployed his troops into Hungary on March 19, 1944.

Their first and immediate action was to start clearing the country of Jews with the eager and most enthusiastic help of the Hungarian Gentile population. Without the assistance of Jew hunting by the general public, be it in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, or other countries, the Nazis could never have recognized, rounded up and killed so many Jews as they did.

Laws concerning the Jews appeared daily, with more and more restrictions. Jewish businesses had to be closed, our valuables had to be turned in, telephones in Jewish homes were disconnected, and all travel was forbidden. Bad news and fear swept through the Jewish community in hushed whispers. Within

days we were ordered to wear a yellow star, with the word "Jude" on it. How busy we were sewing those stars on our clothes! There was no more laughter, smiling faces or small talk among us. It felt as if a terrible storm was gathering, a devastating hurricane was about to hit us and there was nowhere we could hide from it. In our naivete, or because of our helplessness, we wrapped ourselves in false hope that somehow we will weather out this storm. I continued to work very hard on my studies. I still wanted to have good grades.

Life for the Jews worsened by the day. In the surrounding smaller towns and villages, the Jewish population was rounded up and herded into our city. I saw unending lines of families marching in front of our windows. The possessions that they could gather together in a hurry, were piled up on horse-drawn carriages. The old and sick were sitting on top of their belongings. Men, pregnant women, women with babies, children tugging their mother's skirt were marching next to them.

The Hungarian authorities designated a few streets, where most of the Jews lived, to be the ghetto and jammed the people in the houses. Each family - grandparents, parents, and children - were allowed only one room. My family, and those Jews who

lived in other parts of the city, still remained in their homes.

May was approaching and with it my graduation. I was still nervous and worried about it. I would get up each morning in the early dawn, and go to our garden to study, just as I had done every year in the spring before the year-end exams. It was so peaceful there. Spring, that beautiful time of the year! The birds were singing, the trees and flowers - of which we had so many - were blossoming. The scent of the budding lilac trees, my mother's favorite, sweetened the air. Our garden seemed like a little paradise. I walked up and down the narrow pathways between the flower beds, reading and memorizing the textbooks. Nothing here reminded me of the outside world, the world which was raging with fire and hate. To me, that world gone mad existed only on the other side of our gates.

I had heard on the radio Hitler's shrieking, rabble-rousing speeches against the Jews. I had heard that most of the Jewish girls in Slovakia were taken away from their homes. I had heard about the Polish ghettos but to me these were horrors going on in other countries, in faraway places.

Today I cannot understand why it was still so important for me, for the Jewish students, to graduate, to work hard to achieve

excellent grades. Did we refuse to realize what was happening to us? Did we not want to see that our days were numbered? That we are sentenced to die? Did we hope that by denying the reality it would not happen, it would go away? Who can explain?

One day late at night, working on homework, I saw through the window my father and my older brother, Ervin, digging a huge hole in the garden. I heard my mother in the other room packing some of our valuables. Later, I saw my father and my brother drag a wooden trunk to the garden and bury it in the ground. I kept on studying.

I remember my father listening on the radio to the Hungarian Section of the BBC news reports broadcast from London, England . He did it under great danger since this was forbidden; it was against the law to listen to foreign broadcasts. He turned the radio so quiet he had to press his ear to the speaker in order to be able to hear it. In those last few weeks this was what he did all day long.

When I think of my father the first thought that comes to my mind is the deep love he felt for our mother. How much he adored her! He would constantly remind us children; "You are so lucky to

have the best, most giving mother in this whole world. She lives her life only for you, for your well being" he used to tell us.

When Ervin and I, were away from home in school (I attended the fourth and fifth grades of the Gymnasium in Budapest) or when we children were on our yearly summer vacations at our grandparents, my father would write us long letters. The pages were filled with praises of our mother; how we should always appreciate her, love her, and respect her, because she so deserves it. Our mother was a beautiful person, caring, compassionate. Everyone who knew her loved her and called her "Annuska", the affectionate way to pronounce her name, Anna.

After the war Ervin found a couple of our father's beautiful letters along with a few photographs scattered among the rubbish in the basement of our home, and we have them today.

I also remember my father as a very loving, devoted son, who had the highest respect for his parents. His mother, Fannie Ernst, came from a Hungarian Jewish family going back many generations. She was a very pretty girl, the only child of her father's second marriage. As I see it now, she must have been pampered by her parents, and later by her husband, my grandfather.

My father's father, Herman Kupferstein, in his younger years was a well to do landowner. Bad luck caused him to lose his land,

so when the children were grown and had their own families he and Grandmother immigrated to America. It was unfortunate that it happened at the time when America was suffering from the Depression. The difficulties they encountered financially, and the longing for their children (one daughter and three sons) made them return to Hungary. From then on Grandfather worked for a nobleman, managing his estates and his vineyards in the region of Tokay. The most well known wine of Hungary, the Tokay wine, was produced from the grapes of these vineyards. My grandparents were provided with servants and a comfortable home, surrounded by many acres of beautiful vineyards. A few years later, when my Grandfather became ill, they moved to our city. Although they were not well off financially, my Grandfather was one of the most respected men in our Jewish community. He was highly educated and people from all walks of life came to seek his wisdom and advice because of his extraordinarily broad knowledge both in Hebrew and in secular matters.

The years that I remember my Grandfather the most, were when he was already very sick; he suffered from colon cancer for years, went through numerous surgeries, but on my many visits to him I never heard him complaining. My father would stop to see him twice daily, every morning on his way to, and every evening on

his way home from his business, the lumberyard. Although there was a steady nurse to help my Grandfather, it was my father who with the utmost tenderness would wash him and would change the dressing on his father's aching body, which was ravaged by painful sores caused by his illness.

Grandfather was a modern, deeply religious man, whose love for his G-d and trust in Him was unshakable even in the midst of the most excruciating pain. I overheard one day as my father recounted to my mother the conversation he had had that morning with his father in which my grandfather said: "I was arguing with the Satan all last night. He was seeking to persuade me to denounce G-d for the pain He inflicted on me. I brought up against this many reasonings from the Scriptures". My grandfather quoted to my father all his arguments with which he opposed the Satan. "It was already morning when he (the Satan) saw that he can not convince me, so he left me", my grandfather concluded. He died a few weeks later. At his funeral, my father with his brothers, and others from the community carried his casket on their shoulders, all the way to the cemetery outside the city. Hundreds of people followed them. My Grandmother was lost without him and she died a few years later.

CHAPTER TWO.

I mentioned earlier how my father spent the weeks before the deportation listening to foreign broadcasts on the radio. The news from abroad was favorable to the Jews. It was clear that the Germans were on the course of losing the war. It made my father so hopeful that the end of the war was not too far away. However, the Jewish situation he did not want to discuss with us. He was always so protective of my mother and us children. For him, his children's education was most important even in the last days. He wanted us to concentrate all our thoughts and energies on our studies. Today I cannot help but wonder whether it was my upcoming graduation that made my father delay our escape from the city until the last possible moment.

My father shielded us as much as he could from all the bad news. Since television was not invented yet - at least it was not marketed yet in Hungary - and since the Germans by censoring all

the media were able to keep most of their atrocities a great secret, we teenagers were not fully aware of the dangers approaching us.

There had always been anti-Semitism in Hungary long before the German occupation. It was not government sponsored, rather it came from its people, especially the uneducated ones. I remember how terrified my brothers were when they had to enlist in the "Levente", the paramilitary group for young boys, Gentiles and Jews alike. They had to attend three times a week in the afternoon, after school. Besides the extremely rigorous exercises, the boys were mistreated by their abusive leaders, who came from the lower class population. The Jewish boys were the ones who received the most beatings not only from the leader but also from their Gentile peers. It was often that my younger brother came home crying, begging my mother not to make him go to the Levente anymore. I watched my mother hugging him, crying with him as she tried to explain to him that he must attend, because if not, he would get into more trouble. Mothers would always protect their children ferociously, but Jewish mothers could not shield their children; they had to watch helplessly as they were being abused.

We saw and physically experienced anti-Semitism on the streets. Young Gentile boys and girls, made disparaging remarks,

calling us "stinking Jews" (budos zsidó). They would often chase us, throwing stones at us as we passed on the street, while they shouted their well known hateful slogan: "Beat the Jews, don't feel sorry for them (úsd a zsidót, ne sajnáld). The stone throwing, the name calling, the chasing became more frequent and more violent every year. But since the anti-Semitism, the violence and the oppressive laws against the Jews were building up gradually, somehow we got conditioned to it and accepted it as the way of life of a Jew.

After the German occupation, this hatred for the Jews exploded even more violently and openly.

Still, I kept on studying and continued to be nervous about my graduation exam. And so were all of the other Jewish students. None of us was thinking: Why am I doing this? What good is it for? Today it is hard for me to understand. Did we hope for a miracle, that we will still have a future and we will need our education? Except for five of us (including me) all the Jewish girls of my graduating class died in the gas chamber less than a month after graduation. And that was the largest number of survivors of any class in my school since we were the oldest, most of us being eighteen. The majority of the Jewish youth of Hungary, although strong and healthy, was not selected for work in Auschwitz..

Knowing that the war was lost for them, the Germans wanted to complete the Final Solution, the annihilation of the Jewish people, in a hurry.

The words, "Final Solution," were not known to us at that time and certainly, even in our wildest nightmare, we could not have imagined the meaning of it.

The week of the exams arrived and I was worried only about my tests, as if all were right with the world, as if all would have been fine for the Jews. As if nothing else needed to be worried about, but my graduation. Why? I can not explain!

Wearing a yellow star, I went to school to take the tests. My father came with me, and anxious that I do well, he nervously paced the corridors during the exams, just as he had all the previous years.

For five days, beginning Monday, the written tests were being given from eight o'clock in the morning until one o'clock in the afternoon. Each student was given a different assignment. I spent the afternoons and evenings preparing for the next day's test. When the week was over, we were going to have two weeks vacation to study and prepare for the week-long oral tests. I did not have the chance to take the oral test.

There was a Jewish young man in our town, who had connections in the local police department. (He also happened to be a personal friend of my father.) Through him the Jewish community was informed ahead of time about the impending plans concerning the Jews of the city. He alerted the Jewish community that soon will start the rounding up of all the families and they will be moved into the ghetto. As my father was telling us this news, it was the first time I saw him scared. He was by nature an eternal optimist, always calm and hopeful. When no one else did, he would find a reason for a glimmer of hope, believing that things will soon turn for the better. Seeing him so frightened and so hopeless, a devastating fear came over me. I felt that the world had collapsed. Suddenly, from that moment on, graduation was not important to me anymore!

My parents decided that we would try to escape from the city, before we would be moved to the ghetto. There was talk that Evi, my younger sister who had a non-Jewish appearance and could pass for an Aryan, should go into hiding in a convent. But Evi did not want to hear of being separated from us.

Our forged Gentile documents were ready; my father must have prepared them, but I was not aware of it until then. We hastily made some more preparations. I went with my mother to the

beauty shop (owned by Jewish girls) and had my hair colored brown. I had red hair and that was a problem because the Hungarian Gentiles believed that anyone who has red hair is a Jew. Just by looking at me, they would know that I am Jewish. (That was also the reason that I experienced more chasing and stone-throwing than the others.) I liked myself with brown hair, but since the Hungarian Gentile girls almost all had straight blond hair, I don't think I looked very Christian with my curly brown hair. That I was not caught, must have been because G-d was watching over me from the start.

According to our escape plan, each day, one member of our family would travel to Budapest, where for the moment, the Jews of the city were still allowed to live in their homes. We did not know for how long it would be --a few days, a few weeks-- before they would also be moved into a ghetto, but we desperately wanted to gain some time. The Russian Army was already very close to Hungary's borders, practically on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains, so every day was crucial for our survival. We were hoping that soon Hitler will surrender.

Some Polish Jewish families lived in our city as Aryan Poles with false documents. They had come to Hungary seizing the

opportunity to seek refuge from Hitler among the thousands of Aryan Poles who had fled their country when Germany invaded Poland in September, 1939. The Hungarian authorities aided the Gentile Polish refugees, but were after the Jews who had false Gentile identification papers. To find them, there were house to house searches (called razia) conducted periodically in different parts of the city. The young man with the connection in the police department, alerted the community when and where these searches would take place. Then the Jews of the city risking their own safety hid the Polish Jews in their homes. One particular family - father, mother and teenage son - came to stay with us on such occasions, until it was safe to return to their home.

My parents were warned often by these Polish friends to leave the country; "It is just a matter of time until the Germans invade Hungary" they would say, and then we would have the same fate as the Jews of Poland. But the Hungarian Jews, including my parents, did not want to believe this. They trusted the government with the liberal Admiral Horthy Miklos as the Regent and refused to recognize the rising power of right-wing elements. They did not heed the Polish Jews' predictions, and despite all the warning signals, the Jewish people stayed.

Our Polish friend offered to my parents (possibly to return our favor) that he would travel with each of us children to Budapest. We would pretend not to know each other, but he would keep an eye on us from a distance and the next day, when he returned to our city, he could tell our parents whether we arrived in Budapest safely. Not that they could have done anything in case we did not.

I was the first to leave, with my girlfriend Edith. We purposely planned to take the evening train. We felt that the safest time to travel was during the night with the darkness making us less noticeable. It was early evening, still light outside, when my mother and father came with me to the door. I still see the agonizing expression on their faces, the anguish in their eyes, as they sent their daughter in danger's way; they made their decision with heavy hearts, hoping that their decision would make surviving possible. There were no words spoken, what could we have said? A quick hug was our good-bye before I stepped out the door. I could not have imagined then that the brief good-bye to my father, was forever.

My older brother, Ervin, came with me to the train station. I was not wearing my yellow star anymore, but he was wearing his. He needed it for his way back. He carried my suitcase in one

hand, and with his free hand, took off his cap and covered his yellow star with it. It would have been dangerous if someone were to see a Jew carrying a suitcase. Jews were not allowed to travel anymore from one place to the other. We took the side streets, the ones we hoped would most likely be deserted. We were lucky - there were hardly any people on the streets. It was supper time, and everyone was in their homes. The windows were covered by law with dark paper to keep the city dark. No light was allowed to be seen from the outside in case of air raids. So no one saw us from the houses as we were passing by their windows.

On our way, we stopped for Edith. She already had said good-bye to her parents and the three of us continued our walk to the station. The sun had slowly disappeared, it was getting dark, and dusk was a great help for us. We timed our arrival at the train station so that we could board soon and not have to stand around. As we came close to the station, Ervin handed me the suitcase, we whispered good-bye and he quickly turned and started home. Without the suitcase, he did not have to cover his yellow star anymore. It was safer for him to have it showing in case he would meet someone who would recognize him and report him for not

wearing a yellow star. I can just see in what torment my parents waited for him to return.

Edith and I boarded the train and our story was, in case someone would ask, that we are friends and we are going for a vacation to Budapest.

Our Polish chaperone sat close to us, but we acted as if we did not know each other. In the cabin of the train, only a very dim light was allowed and the darkness spared us from the suspicious and piercing glances of the other passengers. The Gentile population was eager to discover and report any Jew who tried to escape. And we certainly did not look Christian - not me with my curly brown hair nor Edith with her auburn hair. We were lucky. Nobody asked us any questions and we tried to be as inconspicuous as possible. Burying our faces in each other's shoulder Edith and I pretended to sleep. After a few hours of traveling, we heard the conductor come into our section of the train and ask everyone for identification papers. This was expected and we just hoped it would pass without trouble. My heart was pounding like a beating drum; I hoped that nobody would hear it. It was beating so fast, it wanted to jump out of my body, but when the conductor got to us, we handed him our false Gentile documents in a seemingly indifferent manner. He flashed his flashlight first on our papers, then on our

faces and went on to the next passenger. We relaxed a little, knowing that until daybreak we were relatively safe.

It started to get light outside, but we still had some time to travel until we would arrive in Budapest. We continued to pretend that we were asleep and hid our faces as much as possible. Did we think, if we don't see them, they won't see us?

As we got close to the Budapest station, the train slowed down and all of a sudden there was a commotion as a girl, and a boy behind her, ran through the cabins. The conductor was running after them, hollering "catch them, catch them, they are Jews." The passengers, woken up by the noise, were still sleepy so nobody moved. By this time the train was moving slowly into the station, where there were a lot of people. Did that boy and girl have a chance to jump off the train, and get lost in the crowd? I don't know! I know they were Jews trying to escape.

Edith and I got off the train and quickly mingled in the crowd. Once in Budapest, we felt safe. It was easier to go unnoticed in a big city. The Jews had to wear the yellow star there also, but they were not isolated in a ghetto yet. So the situation was somewhat less tense at least for the time being. With our Polish chaperone, we boarded a trolley to my maternal grandparents' apartment.

CHAPTER THREE.

It was three years earlier, that my grandparents came to live in Budapest. Before that, they had lived in a small village in the Carpathian region of Hungary, close to the Polish border.

This was the story of my family:

My grandfather, Shaje Grunberg, was a self-made millionaire. He was born and lived with his family in the northeastern part of Hungary, in a little village named Voloc at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains. This was a region of forests, the mountains covered with beautiful dense forestry. Most of the inhabitants made their living from the timber industry. As a young boy, my grandfather worked for lumber companies, transporting the hewed trees on horse-drawn carts from the forests to the saw-mills. It did not take long until he had his own horse and cart, and then purchased some small forests. He was now delivering his own timbers to the saw-

mills. His business grew and eventually he established his own saw-mill and lumber yard and bought many more forests.

My grandfather married my grandmother Pepi Neuman and as the years went by they had ten children, five boys and five girls. One of the girls, the third daughter, Anna, born in 1901, was my mother.

World War I broke out in 1914 and when the Russians advanced toward Hungary's border, the family fearing Communism, left their home and fled in the direction of Budapest. During the long journey on a horse-drawn carriage, a blood clot developed on my grandmother's leg, which was already troubled by varicose veins. My forty-two year old grandmother died in Budapest, leaving my grandfather with the ten children, the youngest still a baby.

World War I ended and under the Treaty of Versailles, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory to its neighboring countries. The family returned to Voloc, which now belonged to the newly formed Czechoslovakia.

My grandfather remained a widower for several years, and during that time my mother a young girl, along with her older sister Serena, took care of their siblings.

In December, 1923 my mother married my father, Izidor Kupferstein who with his family lived in the part of Hungary referred to by the Hungarians after World War I as the crippled "Mother Country" or "The Mutilated Hungary". My parents settled in the city of Debrecen where my older brother, Ervin and I were born. I was about two years old when we moved to the nearby city of Nyiregyhaza. Here, my sister Eva and my brother Otto (whom we affectionately called Ocsi (little brother") were born.

Meanwhile, my grandfather remarried, and with his second wife had two children: A boy, Miklos (we called him Matyu) was three months older than I was, and a girl Vera, who was a year younger than me. I considered my young uncle and aunt more as cousins than uncle and aunt.

I must have been eight or nine years old when I first learned, that my grandmother Linka was my mother's stepmother and that I was named in Hebrew after my mother's mother, Pesel. Each of my mother's siblings and many others in the extended family, named their first born daughters after my grandmother. I discovered with amazement after my liberation from the Lager that all the Pesels in the family survived Aushwitz, except a baby cousin of mine. Babies had no chance to survive.

My grandfather's business flourished and he became a wealthy man. At my earliest recollection, my grandfather employed a few hundred workers in his business. As a child, on my many visits to my grandparents, I was fascinated to watch how the men operating the machines transformed timbers into boards and planks. The name Shaje Grunberg was well known not only in the region but far beyond, and more importantly, it was always associated with his many charitable deeds. Decades later, when I was already in America, I would meet people, who knew my grandfather. They would eagerly tell me about his enormous generosity, how he sought out those in need, never refusing anyone who turned to him for help. Some told me that the yeshivas (Hebrew Schools) they attended were maintained solely by Shaje Grunberg. The enthusiasm with which they told me their stories, led me to believe that they felt privileged to have known him.

Our whole family spent a lot of time in Voloc. The Passover holidays were celebrated yearly at my grandparents' specious three story home. It resembled a castle with its rounded architecture, its curved balconies and the small towers on the four corners of the roof which was covered with orange colored shingles.

Even though Voloc was a small village it was not a backward place. Nestled in a valley surrounded by the majestic Carpathian Mountains, vacationers came from distant big cities - from Prague, when it belonged to Czechoslovakia, from Budapest when it was under Hungarian rule, and others- to enjoy its crystal clear air and beautiful scenery in the summers. The mountains were the perfect place for skiers in the winter. Visitors flocked into the village in the mid 1930's when the Czechs built a ski slope and held a small scale winter Olympics in Voloc.

My brothers, sister and I, along with our cousins spent every summer vacation in Voloc. Those were carefree, wonderful times. We played in the lumberyard building little houses, jumping and burying ourselves in heaps of sawdust. Free as birds, we roamed the nearby hills, picking berries and collecting hazelnuts from the bushes which so plentifully covered the hills. We competed as to who could gather to take home the most hazelnuts, and the next day, the wonderful aroma of cakes and pastries permeated the house.

With aunts, uncles, cousins and vacationers, who quickly became friends of our family, we went on day-long outings on the mountains, aiming for the summit. We left at early dawn, each of us carrying a backpack full of sandwiches and snacks, and when

we reached the top of the high mountains, we found them covered with snow, even in summertime. We rested in the small lodging houses (called "Chata" in Czech) before we started back down the mountains' serpentine roads, winding our way through the forests which echoed our singing and our laughter. My family and the rest of the population lived a happy life under the democratic, enlightened Czech government.

In 1938, with the approval of Hitler, Hungary retook some of its lost territories, including Voloc, from Czechoslovakia. It was a sad day for the Jews when the Hungarian troops marched into the region. They feared the Hungarians, knowing their traditional hatred toward the Jews, and that they taught their very young that the Jews crucified Jesus and that they are evil people.

We spent our last summer vacation in Voloc in 1939. My sister and I were thrilled that there was no more need for passports and that there were no more border checks. But our vacation was not as happy as before. We had many heated discussions with our young aunt Vera. She was sad; she missed her wonderful Czech friends who had moved, while my sister and I expressed our happiness over the reunification of our country.

Evi and I, along with all the children in Hungary, were taught in school (non-Jewish and Jewish alike) to be true patriots. Our

schooldays started with reciting the poem:

" Can it stay like this?

No, no never!

The mutilated Hungary is not a country

The greater Hungary is Heaven!"

There were many similar patriotic songs and slogans taught in school expressing the Hungarian people's desperation over the maiming of their homeland. I considered Hungary my country and I had been so indoctrinated that, I also truly felt that a terrible injustice had happened to Hungary at the end of World War I with the Treaty of Versailles.

My grandparents' fear of the Hungarians proved to be with good reason, when in 1940 my grandfather was arrested. His release was eventually obtained with money and connections, but the family had to leave Voloc, leaving behind the business, their spacious home, and most of their belongings. My grandparents moved to Budapest where they lived in a rented three room apartment in a modest apartment building, with Matyu, Vera, and one of my uncles, Lajos and his wife Feigi, who was expecting a baby at that time. After the German occupation when Jews fled from the countryside to Budapest, many found refuge in my

grandparents' small apartment until they could find a hiding place for themselves.

CHAPTER FOUR.

When Edith and I fled to Budapest, we also went to stay with my grandparents. Being with them I was relaxed and I did not think that my family might not be able to follow me. Was it because of my youth, that I was sure this was just a temporary situation? I thought we would have to be in hiding only for a short time, then we would go home and continue our lives the way we had lived before.

Our Polish friend who escorted us to Budapest returned to our city and two days later came back with my fifteen year old sister, Evi. Our friend made one more trip returning with my fourteen year old brother, Otto. Then came my older brother, Ervin, who was not yet twenty. With the children safely in Budapest, my mother left our home, and with her arrival, I felt confident, that my

father will also be with us soon and that our family will survive this war. It did not happen that way. By the time my father was to come, all the Jews in our city, my father among them, were moved into the ghetto. My father did attempt to escape but was caught, imprisoned, and shortly after that, as we learned later, the ghetto was liquidated and he was taken together with the rest of the Jews of our city to Auschwitz.

During a visit with my husband's sisters in Australia in 1995, I met a woman from Nyiregyhaza who related to me that she and her family were in the same cattle wagon as my father. "He davened (prayed) constantly all the way to Auschwitz" she told me. My poor father! He was probably thanking G-d for his family being safe in Budapest.

As soon as my mother arrived in Budapest, we started making plans for our hiding. It was decided that we will go into hiding separately, so that if one of us gets caught, the others would still have a chance to survive. But Evi would be with my mother; she was not willing to be separated from her.

My uncle Bizi, the brother of my father, who lived in Budapest knew many non-Jewish people through his business. He knew of one family whose house was in the industrial part of the outskirts of Budapest. Since this part of the city was one of the main targets

of bombardment by the Allied forces, the family had left to live in the countryside. My uncle rented the house and my girlfriend Edith and I went to stay there. And so began the different phases of my life in hiding.

We stayed in this house only for a few days. We felt terribly alone and scared, so when Edith learned that her parents and sister had arrived in Budapest, she wanted to be with them. I went back to my grandparents' apartment.

My next hiding place was again found by my uncle. This time it was with a young Gentile working couple, who, for money, were willing to take me in. Their apartment was so small, it actually consisted of one big room, which was divided by curtains into cubicles. I stayed in one of those cubicles. The couple left for work in the morning and I was alone all day. I was not to move around, so that the neighbors shouldn't hear any noise and get suspicious. There was also the problem that the apartment did not have a bathroom. Each floor in the building had a communal toilet at the end of the corridor. During the day, although most of the tenants were at work, it was still very risky to go out of the apartment because somebody might see me. At night in the dark it was safer, but what if someone else also had to use the toilet at the same time? I stayed behind the curtains in my cubicle, sat on

the bed, and cried all day and all night. I didn't sleep, I didn't eat. The couple asked me to have supper with them but I felt I would choke if I would take even one bite. After barely a week, I could not tolerate the loneliness anymore. I had no contact with anyone from my family; I did not know what was happening to them. I felt I was being walled in alive.

Again I went back to my grandparents. My mother and my sister were still there. My younger brother was placed with a Christian couple in a similar situation to mine. My older brother Ervin rented a room and signed up for a job in an government-owned factory. Ervin had the advantage that his appearance was a lot like a Gentile. He had straight blond hair, fair skin, a straight nose, his features were not Jewish and he had perfect Aryan documents. His identification papers were not fictitious; they were bought from an existing Gentile boy. He was now called Vacy Istvan. In the factory, security was tight; he had to present the identification papers every morning at arrival. I guess they thought that no Jew would dare to do this and they were not suspicious.

I wanted to be with my mother and sister; I felt I could not endure being separated from them. So we decided to rent a room together as a Gentile family. On our papers, which were fictitious, the three of us had the same last name, and according to the

papers, we came from the small village of Voloc (where my grandparents used to live before they moved to Budapest.) Our story was that since this village was close to the Polish border, we left our home, out of fear of the approaching Russians.

In the ad section of the newspaper we saw there was a room for rent in an apartment building in a middle class neighborhood of the city. The landlady was a widow, whose son was away, probably in the army. While we stayed there -- it turned out to be a very short time -- we visited my grandparents every day. They were preparing to flee to neighboring Slovakia where we still had relatives. Most of the Jews from Slovakia were deported already in 1942, but a few were exempt from deportation because the Slovak economy needed them. And so, at the moment they were not being bothered.

My grandparents' apartment was quite a distance from where we rented the room. We had to travel by trolley and those trips were terrifying. Trying to act as Christians, each time we passed a church and saw people crossing themselves, we also crossed ourselves. After a while, we stopped doing it, fearing it would give us away, if we didn't do it correctly. The passengers on the trolley, ordinary Hungarian citizens, stared intensely, scrutinizing people's faces to see whether there was anyone with Semitic looks who

was not wearing a yellow star. We were terrified that one of them would have the idea that we look Jewish and start asking questions. The Gentile documents were fine as long as no one got suspicious and no questions were asked. Once a disguised Jew was stopped, it usually ended with an arrest. But my mother missed the family so much that we had to take the risk to go and spend some time with them, no matter how dangerous it was.

We stayed in the rented room about a week, when the landlady's son came home for the weekend. That Saturday night a loud argument coming from the next room woke us up. It was the son screaming and accusing his mother of hiding the Jews - us - and that he will report her. There is no way to put in words our utter terror as his screaming went on and on for a long time. Shaking with fright the three of us crowded into my mother's bed. Sitting in her bed hugging each other, we waited in anguished silence for him to call the police or come and kill us. A while later the hollering stopped. He must have decided that he will take care of the matter the next morning. We spent the night trembling, not knowing what will happen to us. In the early dawn, being careful not to make the slightest noise, we got dressed. Each of us put on a few layers of underwear and the few dresses that we had and walked out of the apartment not even closing the door

behind us to avoid making any sound. We were hoping he was still asleep and would not follow us. Hurriedly, we tiptoed down the stairway, but once on the street we had to slow down so as not to draw attention to ourselves.

Leaving our rented room, we now had nowhere to go. It was just a day or two before, that everyone from my grandparents' apartment (my grandparents, my young aunt Vera, my uncle Lajos, with his wife and their two year old little daughter) had left for Slovakia. Miklos (Matyu) my mother's eighteen year old brother went into hiding as a Christian.

It is hard to describe how fearful we were being out on the street, where any moment someone could point a finger at us, that we look Jewish and drag us to the police. It is hard to describe how it was to live in hiding, to be forced to be a fugitive for the only crime, that we were born Jewish. Our very existence was a crime. The fear that we felt is incomprehensible to those who did not live through it.

From a public telephone we called my brother Ervin and met him in a park. In this sad and desperate situation we had to be careful yet, to give the appearance of being a carefree Christian family, who was spending a nice Sunday morning in the park.

Ervin brought a newspaper with him to look for another room to rent. We thought it would be safer to rent this time in a more affluent neighborhood, hoping that the upper class, more educated Christians would be more tolerant. I never wondered how we had money to live on. Being with my mother, it seemed natural for me not to worry about that. She probably brought money with her from home. It was so difficult for my mother, since in our house, all finances were taken care of by my father. My mother was very sheltered and dependent on my father and now suddenly she was left alone with the terrible responsibility to make all the decisions herself, to save her family.

We knew Budapest well having spent some vacations there and also from the time when I went to school there. So when we saw in the newspaper that there were some furnished rooms for rent in Buda, the hilly part of Budapest, on the other side of the Danube river, we knew from the address that this was the upper class section of the city.

Ervin came with us to rent the apartment. Today I see how foolish it was of us to let him come along and take the risk of being caught and arrested if it were discovered that we were Jewish. But he was trying to give moral support to my mother.

It was a pharmacist's widow who was renting her apartment. She wanted to leave the city to avoid the air raids, which were getting more and more frequent, the sirens sounding several times a day. We introduced ourselves by our false names according to our papers and told our story; We fled from our home which was close to the Polish border because we feared the approaching Russian army. Ervin's last name was different from ours so, we introduced him as my boyfriend. This was such an unlikely story, since the two of us resembled each other so much. Also, why would a Gentile family choose to come to live in Budapest, the target of Allied bombings instead of other cities where things were quiet for the Christian population? All this made people easily suspicious of us, and we knew it but there was nothing we could change, just hope and pray every minute of the day.

The woman did not ask questions. My feeling is that she suspected that we were Jewish. Maybe she felt sorry for us and thought that by pretending not to know it, she would not be in danger. Or maybe she needed the money. The rent was high and it was not easy to rent an apartment in Budapest in those days, except for hiding Jews. Even in peacetime, in the summer, whoever could, left the city to escape the summer's heat, the

sweltering apartments. She rented us the apartment and we right away stayed.

When I look back on those days, I see how poorly we played the role of our Gentile identity in an environment where the population so passionately hunted the Jews.

Now we lived in a modern building on a beautiful tree-lined street, in one of the nicest section of Budapest, populated by Christians. Even the weather was beautiful -- sunshine and blue skies every day. The beautiful weather did not reflect what was in our hearts which were full of fear and sorrow. Constantly alert as to whether anyone was looking at us with suspicion, we never relaxed, not for a moment. We didn't talk about what might have happened to my father or where he was. Was it because those thoughts would have been too painful, or were our minds so full of fear for our lives that there was no room for other thoughts?

The landlady stayed on for a couple of days and she came back for weekends. She kept her bedroom for herself and we used the rest of the apartment. She was an intelligent, pleasant and friendly woman. Whenever my mother was in the kitchen she would go to talk to her and in the meantime she watched with suspicious eyes how my mother was cooking. The Gentiles knew about the Jewish

law of not mixing meat with dairy products, so my mother was careful to prepare the meals the way a Gentile women would. It was heartbreaking for my mother that we could not keep kosher, (Jewish dietary laws) but we could not count on this women, not reporting us if she knew for sure that we are Jews. Today I want to believe that she did know that we were Jewish and wanted to help us.

It was now the beginning of June and on the 6th we woke up to a beautiful day. The news on the radio made it seem that this time the sun is shining for us also. It reported the Normandy Invasion, the Allied Forces landing on the shores of Normandy in France. I cannot find words to describe our happiness! Listening to the news, I felt that the Allies were an army of angels pushing toward the beaches of Normandy. I felt that the heavens had opened and the parachuting soldiers are descending to this earth for only one reason: to rescue us. It was the first time since we left home that we saw some hope for the future. I envisioned that the war will end in a matter of days. Surely Hitler will surrender now. He must acknowledge and accept that he lost the war. I spread a map of Europe on the table and followed the Allied troops' advances in Italy and France. To our surprise the newspapers and

the radio did report the success of the Normandy landing, but we also read with aching hearts about the enormous casualties the Allies had suffered, which the media was so eager to report in great detail. I felt that every soldier who died gave his life trying to rescue us.

A few days went by before I realized that the war would not end so soon. Hitler was obsessed with fighting for every square inch of land; he would not surrender. The Allied Forces had to fight fiercely for each little village, for each tiny town. They could advance only ever so slowly and for us it was so painfully slow. Every day it was a miracle to survive in that hostile world.

The safest place to be was in the apartment and we would have preferred to stay in all the time, not to go on the streets at all, but we had to be careful to give the appearance of living a normal life. We went grocery shopping; I had to go to the beautician periodically to color my hair. And then there were the air raids, when by law everyone had to leave the apartments and go to the air shelters. I was not afraid of the bombs. I felt they would not hit us. Those planes, those pilots high up in the air were our friends, our liberators, our only hope. The more often the air raids came, the more hopeful I was that the Nazis will surrender before we are caught, before we are tortured. I was more afraid of that than the

bombs. Every time the air raid sirens began to wail, I felt that our liberation was coming a step closer.

In the air shelters, located in the basement of each apartment building, the tenants looked at us with suspicion. They all wanted to know who we are and where had we come from. On one occasion a distinguished looking gentleman came up to us to ask where we had lived before. When we mentioned Voloc, as was written in our false papers, (my grandparents' former home town) he said "I know the village, I spent a vacation there. Do you know the priest of the little church?" My mother knew exactly where the church was and described it to him. She knew the priest and told the man his name. After that, he did not bother us anymore, but this was a close call for us.

These were the educated, upper class Hungarians, still they were all eager to report the hiding Jews, even though reporting them did not bring any reward. I was glad when the thundering noise of a nearby falling bomb diverted their attention and made them so scared that they left us alone.

In the shelter the three of us sat as close to each other as we could; My mother in the middle, my sister and I buried our heads in my mother's lap. She bent over us so that if we were hit by a

bomb, we should die together. We did not want to stay alive without each other.

Somehow our lives slowly fell into a routine. Evi and I cleaned the apartment; my mother cooked. My brother, Ervin came for supper very often. This was important for my mother. She wanted to see him and she was also worried that he was not eating properly, since he lived alone. My younger brother, Ocsi was still with the Gentile couple, where he was placed when our hiding began. We paid them for keeping him. We thought he will be safer living with people who knew he was Jewish than living on false Christian papers. Ocsi was not allowed to leave the apartment, so my mother went to visit him, not caring about the enormous danger that went with these visits. She could not bear not to see him. Evi and I went along with her, until we came close to the apartment building where my brother stayed. Then we waited on the street (a daring thing to do) until Mother came back. These visits were so painful for her, not knowing whether there will be a next time when she will see her son again. Only now, that I am myself a mother, can I fully understand my mother's suffering.

Although our lives were enveloped with dangers and fear, we children started to adjust to this way of life. But my mother couldn't. She was grieving silently about my father and she missed

the rest of her family, - her parents, sisters, and brothers - with whom she always felt so close. She felt isolated, because living as Christians we could not be in contact with anyone from the Jewish community. She was longing to see the few family members who lived as Gentiles in the city, but hiding Jews did not want to get together since that heightened the danger of being caught. Despite this, we visited my cousin Ilonka who also had fled to Budapest and was living as a Christian on false papers. Those were anxious but precious moments that we spent together. But Ilonka soon left Budapest, escaping to Bucharest, Romania.

There was Fanny Brecher, my mother's cousin, who was courageous enough to be willing to meet us in a park. We would sit on benches close by, pretending not to know each other. We stayed for a short while and as we would leave, careful that no one is nearby, we would whisper the time and place for our next meeting. These meetings were seldom, and although we could not talk to each other, it meant so much to my mother just to see someone from her family for a few short moments. It gave her some strength to go on.

One of my mother's brothers, my Uncle Dezso, was stationed in the outskirts of Budapest in a Hungarian military labor

camp set up for Jewish men. My mother wanted to see him, so the three of us traveled by streetcar and took some food packages for him. I have no idea what my mother told the guards once we got there, why we, Gentile women, came to see a Jewish man. It is almost unbelievable that Jews in hiding would dare to do such a thing but Mother missed the family so much that it made her disregard the risks and dangers of these meetings and visits.

The news reports about the war continued to give us hope. The Russian army on the east and the Allied forces on the west were advancing, but to me it seemed they were only able to *crawl* from one village to the next. I wished so hard they would move forward faster that I felt that the sheer strength of my wish will push the whole army all the way to Paris. I thought that this will make Hitler finally surrender.

Meanwhile, the situation for the Jews in Budapest grew worse. By the middle of July, they were removed from their apartments and were concentrated in so called "Jewish houses." These houses with the yellow star affixed on the front door of the building (indicating that Jews lived there) were scattered all over the city and by doing that, the Hungarian government hoped that the bombing will stop or at least be reduced. Surely the enemy, the friends of the Jews, won't want to kill them. Being concentrated in

those marked houses, the Jews were easy targets for the Germans and the Hungarian Nazis, the so-called "Nyilas" "Arrow-Cross" Party.

Since living as Christians in Budapest was becoming increasingly dangerous, the Jews in hiding, among them a few of the remaining members of our family, tried to escape to neighboring Slovakia or Romania, where at the moment, the situation of the Jews was still safer.

My grandparents who had fled a few weeks earlier and were now staying in Slovakia, hired a Slovak peasant to smuggle some of our family members from Budapest to Slovakia. They were my Uncle Dezso's wife, Gizi, with a baby daughter, (their five year old daughter, Aliza, remained in Budapest with a Gentile woman), my younger brother Ocsi, and Matyu, my mother's youngest brother. All of them traveled by train to meet their guide at the Slovak border. It was the middle of the night when they arrived but the guide did not show up. They were arrested by the Hungarian police and were taken to a concentration camp in Mosonmagyaróvár, from where Matyu managed to escape, with the help of Terry, a Christian girl. Terry, the eighteen year old daughter of the superintendent of the apartment building where my grandparents used to live, had a teenage crush on my young uncle. Matyu

returned to Budapest and living there as a Christian, survived the war. But I never learned the details as to how Terry was able to accomplish his rescue.

My brother, my aunt and her baby were shipped from the concentration camp to Auschwitz, where my aunt and her baby were killed in the gas chamber as soon as they arrived. My brother, only fourteen years old but tall for his age and saying he was older, was selected for work. It was many months after liberation, that Ervin and I learned about the fate of our younger brother from someone who was with him and was one of the few who survived from his group. We learned that our brother was in Auschwitz until the following December. At that time, with the Russian army nearing Auschwitz, the Germans liquidated the camp, marching the prisoners - now known as the Death March - further into Germany. The prisoners, who were weak and skeletal from starvation, marched, dragging themselves in the the snow in sub-zero, blizzard winter weather for days without food and only rags on their bodies. Those, among them our brother, who could go no further and fell, were shot by the guards and were left dying on the road. Did my young brother, still a child, die instantly from a bullet or was he left to suffer, slowly freezing to death? I will never know!

After we heard that Ocsi was captured, Mother became more and more distraught and felt that she could not go on living in hiding. She wanted to be among Jews, she wanted us to move into one of the "Jewish Houses" and face our fate together with the rest of our fellow Jews. But this was not as easy as we thought.

We went to one "Jewish House" where to our terrible disappointment, we were informed that the place was already overcrowded. They must turn us away because we cannot be registered, since we cannot tell where we are coming from, where we were before. We tried other "Jewish" houses but soon we realized that none would take us.

Our other hope was the Swedish Embassy, which established a few "Swedish Houses" and was giving refuge to Jews in an effort to save some. One early morning my mother left for the Embassy; she did not want us to come along because not wearing the Jewish star while waiting around the Embassy until we would be let in, was extremely dangerous. This risk she wanted to take alone. Evi and I waited in the apartment as hour after hour went by and Mother did not come back. We were terrified that something dreadful had happened, that she had been arrested. I leaned out of the window, practically hanging out of it, and hoped that since our apartment was on a hilly street I could spot her when she

was still very far away. Even seeing her a few seconds before she would get closer, would mean so much to us to know that she is safely walking home.

That day stays in my memory as an agonizingly dark day although it was a beautiful sunny summer day. Evi and I didn't move from the window and then in the late afternoon, I saw something moving on the top of the hill. Although it was so far, that it only looked like a little dot, I knew that it was our mother. I will never forget the paralyzing fear I felt throughout the day and then the indescribable happiness when she was close enough for us to be sure that it was our mother.

I was so happy to see her that I hardly paid attention when she told us with despair, that she could not accomplish what she went for. There were so many desperate Jews waiting around the Embassy, pushing and shoving each other, all trying to get in. The aggressive ones succeeded but by the time my mother was able to reach the gate it was late afternoon and they were closing the Embassy. She was turned away; they did not listen to her plight.

We felt so alone, so helpless, there was nowhere to turn anymore. Nobody wanted to take us in. We had to go on living on Christian papers fearing for our lives every moment of the day.

The war was going badly for the Germans but Hitler still did not want to acknowledge it and did not want to listen to his military advisors who saw that he was leading Germany to its ruins. We did not know at the time that there were many plans made by Hitler's military leaders to kill him, but they were never successful in carrying out their plans.

On the twentieth of July, the radio reported that an assassination attempt had been made against Hitler. At first there were confusing reports about the outcome of the assassination. Nobody knew whether Hitler was alive or not. Once again we felt incredibly hopeful. But our happiness lasted only a few hours when soon the rest of the news arrived, that Hitler was unharmed.

We learned that a bomb was brought into his bunker - where a meeting was scheduled to take place - in the briefcase of one of his army officers. The bomb went off, killing people all around. Hitler was shaken but he was not even injured. Historians have recorded that if Hitler was a madman until now, after this incident he became insane with rage. He made the officers who were involved and some whom he was suspicious of being involved, suffer the most horrible death a human being can invent.

Our happiness was shattered, but knowing that members of his closest military circle wanted him to be killed, left us with some hope that soon there might be another attempt on his life and this time it would be successful.

Once in a while and just for some brief minutes, I was able to be optimistic that the end of this horrible nightmare might not be too far away and maybe it was possible to survive. The Jews still had all the reasons to tremble but the Nazis were losing the war and they knew it. But this did not change the Hungarians' virulent hatred toward the Jews. Quite the contrary, as the news from the battlefields worsened for the Nazis, they with their Hungarian partners, became more feverish to hunt down and exterminate the remaining Jews. They wanted desperately to finish off the "Final Solution" before the war would come to an end.

In the beginning of August we got word from my grandparents in Slovakia wanting us to come there. Soon they would send a Slovak guide to take us over the border to join them. While we were waiting for the arrangements for our escape, we had to continue to give the impression that we were living a normal Christian family life. As much as we trembled each time we stepped out on the street, we still had to go out often. We lived on a high floor and the elevator was manned by the superintendent of the building or

one of the members of his family. Although we were afraid of the superintendent and the tenants who scrutinized us in the elevator it would have aroused a lot of suspicion if they had never seen us going anywhere. Being on the street was suicidal with the Gendarmes, the Hungarian Storm troopers, patrolling the streets. These were young men recruited from the most vicious, merciless Jew haters. Their special duty was to hunt down the disguised Jews. They were mounted on horseback, wearing their dreaded green uniforms, and on their head the notorious hat with the long dark cock-tail. We were always on the lookout for them and spotted them from far away. Always watchful and alert we would never go toward their direction.

To avoid roaming on the streets, we would often go to the movies. Sitting in the dark movie theater gave us some sense of safety. It was such a welcome feeling. One Sunday afternoon, Ervin, Evi and I went to see the "Wizard of Oz" which ^{WAS PLAYING} ~~premiered~~ that summer in Budapest. In front of the movie theater, the crowd was huge, mostly teenage boys and girls. While we waited until we could go in, the three of us tried to hide our faces by forming a tight circle. We listened with grieving hearts how the others chatted and giggled. The crowd around us was so free and happy as young people usually are, but we were so frightened, so depressed, felt so

hunted. I was envious that they came to enjoy the movie as we used to not long ago, while we had come to feel a little safe in the dark if only for a couple of hours.

It was toward the end of August, that the landlady came home for the weekend and her son came to visit her. We had already seen pictures of him in the apartment. His hobby must have been photography since in his room, which was also rented to us, some of the furniture drawers were filled with photographs and hundreds of slides of himself and a girl. They were a good-looking pair; he seemed to be a clean-cut, nice young man in his twenties. To pass our time, Evi and I entertained ourselves looking over those pictures, and we tried to figure out whether they were engaged already. We forgot our problems for the moment and we joked and giggled, as young girls do, as we had in better times.

The landlady introduced her son to us, but he was not friendly and we sensed trouble. Very soon after, as they went to their room, we heard him hollering at his mother and the scene was repeated as in our previous hiding place. Screaming vicious anti-Semitic remarks, he accused his mother of hiding Jews and demanded that she get rid of us. This otherwise well mannered, nice person, who was well educated and brought up in comfort,

hated the Jews just as virulently and passionately as the lower class uneducated masses.

Hearing his screams, we were bewildered and numbed, but we stayed on because we had no other choice. Looking for another apartment would have been dangerous since by now the Gentile population was obsessed with catching every Jew living in hiding. Jews were the topic of their conversation constantly; They said the Jews brought the war, the destruction, and blamed the Jews for any misfortune that happened.

There was no place for us to go, we did not know what else to do, except wait for what will happen next.

After a long time of shouting, the son left the apartment. We sat in our room, panic-stricken, silently waiting for our fate, waiting for the gendarmes to come for us. But they did not come. Why he did not report us that evening, I do not know. Maybe he was afraid that his mother would be accused of hiding the Jews; maybe he wanted to give his mother a chance to send us away. In any event, it seemed to be a miracle.

The landlady never said a word to us; she left for the countryside the next day, without saying goodbye. By now she must have been sure that we were Jews. She knew that we had heard her son's screaming and she probably was hoping that we

will leave the apartment to save ourselves. Today I want to believe that she felt sorry for us. As I am writing this, I wish I would remember her name; I wish I could thank her.

A couple of days later, as if by another miracle, Ervin came to tell us that through Terry he had a message from my grandparents. A Slovak guide will come to our apartment the following Thursday to take us to Slovakia. We hoped and prayed that nothing would happen until then. Although we knew that so many Jews including members of our family were caught while trying to cross the borders, we were so desperate, that we had no alternative but to try it.

Thursday morning the man arrived and brought us three railway tickets for the evening train. (Ervin did not want to leave Budapest). As he left, without discussing with us any details of our escape, he took with him the small suitcase that we had packed, and told us to meet him at the railroad station. We put on a few layers of underwear and a few dresses, and in the late afternoon we walked out from the apartment without any packages, as if we were going for a leisurely walk. Further from the apartment we boarded a trolley toward the dreaded Keleti (East side) railroad station. This was one of the two main railroad terminals in Budapest and was heavily guarded by the Nazis and

the Hungarian gendarmes. There was constant checking of identification papers, partly for political reasons, and to catch escaping Jews.

The station was a huge covered building. Inside, it was relatively dark, since it was already early evening, and hardly any light was allowed to be on. This gave us some protection. Still we felt as if we are about to enter a cage, where wild animals are waiting to jump on us.

My brother Ervin came to meet us at the station, to say goodbye. What an unbelievable risk he took! There wasn't much time; we purposely arrived just before boarding. Hardly saying a word, we fought back our tears, and did not kiss or hug, so that we would not draw attention to ourselves. I cannot forget my mother's tormented expression; she must have felt that she was seeing her son for the last time.

We had been staying next to each other silently only for a few minutes, when the Slovak man, standing a short distance from us, started going toward the train and we knew we had to follow him. It was so quick! And now I felt a sadness at leaving Budapest. Not the city where for the last four agonizing months we so desperately tried to save our lives, but the Budapest of years past, with my memories of theaters, concerts, operas and museums. Was that all

gone forever? How ironic it was, that during that dreadful summer of 1944, the weather in Budapest was almost always beautiful. Against the backdrop of the lazy, sunshine-filled summer days was the stark contrast of our aching, fearful hearts, our constant dark and helpless mood.

Shouldn't it have been a rainy, stormy summer? Shouldn't the skies have cried with us?

CHAPTER FIVE.

The train was crowded with people and it was quite dark inside. Our Slovak guide sat down a few rows in front of us, so that we would see him when he got up at a certain stop to leave the train, and we would follow him.

These Slovak men were peasants who lived in border villages and were familiar with the countryside. They knew when and which section of the border was not patrolled by border guards and many a times they worked together with the guards. They smuggled the Jews over the border for huge sums of money; it became a lucrative business for them.

The place where we got off was a small village, one stop before the last station on the Hungarian side. It was almost midnight. How we got this far was G-d's miracle.

We followed our guide from a distance. He was very careful that there should not seem to be any connection between us. After we got further away from the station and no one was around us anymore, he walked next to us. We walked to the end of the village behind the backyard fences of small peasant houses. Dogs barked at us ferociously, like they bark at prowlers, as we tried to sneak by. We were terrified that the dogs would wake up the people inside or jump over the fence and tear us apart. Even today, I am frightened, and see ourselves sneaking behind those houses, when I hear a dog barking in the dark of the night.

We left the village and came to open fields. It was a moon-filled night with dreaded silence. It was chilly and we were wearing summer dresses since it was warm in Budapest when we left and we had to dress accordingly so as not to arouse curiosity. My mother was wearing a pair of high-laced shoes. She had severe varicose veins (from her pregnancies, I was told), and her legs were always hurting. Evi and I, on the other hand, had sandals on. Mine were the fashionable wedgies, which had very high and narrow platform soles. I was not prepared for a long and difficult walk. Since it was the end of August, the fields were already plowed, ready for sowing the next spring or maybe even for that fall. The ground was rough and cloddy and with every step I took, my

ankles wiggled because of the high and narrow platform sandals. We stumbled about, tripping over the clods and it was so terribly difficult to walk on that rugged terrain that we realized that Mother won't be able to walk through these cloddy fields. Without saying a word, Evi and I put our arms under Mother's, and we lifted her above the ground and carried her for hours through the fields, which were so vast, so frightening, with an eerie stillness. We stopped once in a while for a minute to rest and then we continued to walk through the night, without whispering a word. We were filled with terror to be out in the middle of nowhere in the dead of the night, the three of us with a complete stranger.

It was almost daybreak when we finally came to the end of the plowed fields and from then on the ground was flat and Mother could walk on her own.

After a while our guide stopped to listen and told us that we are just about to cross over the Slovak border. There were no fences, only a short distance away I saw a wooded area, a small forest, and our guide said: "That is already Slovak territory". I was so scared and kept thinking that the border guards must be lurking among the trees.

We were led through the forest, and coming out of the woods, we found ourselves by a main road. Our guide must have

known this area very well because he led us directly to a nearby bus stop. It was getting light, it was early in the morning. There were a few peasants waiting for the bus. We looked very much like fugitives, our city clothes covered with dust, but nobody paid attention to us. The bus arrived shortly, and there were quite a lot of people on, but again, nobody looked at us, not even with curiosity. Had G-d made us invisible, did he make us look normal in those people's eyes?

By the time the bus arrived at the main square of Nyitra - the small town where my grandparents were staying - it was a bright and sunny Friday mid-morning. We walked a short distance to their house without anyone paying attention to us. The family was waiting for us anxiously and when we finally hugged each other, we cried and cried and could not stop. It was hard to control all the emotions that we had repressed the last few months and the previous dreadful night.

Shortly after we arrived, Mother went to bed. The veins in her legs became inflamed and it was terribly painful. We stayed at her bedside and kept putting warm compresses on her aching legs. Seeing her resting in a comfortable bed, I knew that she would get better soon. I felt safe. It had been such a long time since I could

feel that way. It was so wonderful being with some of our family again.

We felt safe that Friday, but the next day started another story.

On Saturday morning we heard that they had begun the rounding up of the Jews in Slovakia, the ones who until now were exempt from deportation because they were needed by the state for their jobs. By the afternoon, our family decided that we all must try to get back to Budapest. Hiding in Nyitra would not be possible when there would be no more Jews there to help us.

Arrangements were made and as soon as night fell, a peasant man came with a horse-driven cart, filled with straw, to smuggle us back to Hungary. Nine of us - my grandparents, my uncle Lajos, his wife, their two year-old daughter, my seventeen year old Aunt Vera, my mother, my sister and I -- climbed into the cart and lay down underneath the straw. In the cover of the night, we started our way back to Budapest, the dreaded city, which we had been so eager to leave, taking all the risks, only two days earlier.

From the distance of so many years, I see ourselves, a small group of bewildered people, who have no way out, who are running in a circle, desperately wanting and trying to save our lives against overwhelming odds.

The man drove us through some small villages and after a few hours of traveling, he stopped the carriage at a farmhouse. I am not sure whether it was his house or someone who was his partner in the human smuggling business. We were told that the attic will be our hiding place until we will be taken further. Climbing up on a tall ladder on the outside of the house to reach a small opening, we crowded into the attic where hay was piled to the ceiling. We climbed into the hay and buried ourselves in it.

I think about my grandparents today. How were they, as older people, able to go through all of this? And how was my mother able to climb that height with her aching legs? And my aunt with the baby on her arm?

The woman at the farmhouse brought us some food and on our second day in the attic, probably for more money, she allowed us to come down and stay in the house. We were told not to make the slightest noise, so we did not speak or make a move. I remember my aunt holding my little cousin all the time. Didn't the child want to walk around? How was her mother able to control a two year old not to make any noise? I have so many questions today. Did my aunt give her little girl some drugs to keep her quiet? Or were those times when one expected a two year old to know

that she is not allowed to play, laugh, cry or walk around? I see that child with my mind's eye, clinging to her mother with a frightened, almost adult-like expression on her little face.

The couple was working during the day and when they returned, they told us that we cannot stay in their house any longer.

Late that night we piled up again into a horse-drawn cart and the peasant man drove us through some more villages. Arriving at a small forest in the early dawn, we were told to hide among the trees throughout the following day. He would come back the next evening to take us further during the night.

Why our attempt to get back to Budapest from Nyitra took much longer than when we came from Budapest, I do not know. It was our guide who chose the way and we were at his mercy.

It was raining, a steady drizzle; it was very cold.

We stayed near the edge of the forest. My aunt lay down under a tree on the cold wet ground, put her little girl on her stomach, covered her with her coat and the little girl fell asleep. Close to the forest was a corn field. The corn stalks were tall and dense so we thought they could give us more protection. Later in the day, one by one we dashed through the short open, field which separated the forest from the cornfield, and hid among

the corn stalks. After a few hours, my little cousin became very hungry. She started to cry and we could not stop her crying. We had nothing to give her to eat. When we noticed a farmhouse in the distance, my aunt said she will go there to ask for some milk. I watched her anxiously from between the corn stalks as she walked through the open field toward the house. A peasant woman opened the door and soon I saw with relief that my aunt was returning with a container of milk.

It was still raining and we were cold and wet. We saw a haystack not far from the cornfield and decided to crawl in to be protected from the rain and to wait there until our guide will come for us in the evening. The haystack was round and huge, and not only very high, but also very wide, so all of us were able to hide in it. But the peasant woman was watching and reported us to the police. We were hiding only for a short time when we heard men running and surrounding the haystack. They shouted for us to come out. As we crawled out I saw soldiers plunging their pitchforks repeatedly into the haystack to drive us out. It was a miracle that we did not get stabbed. We emerged, a pitiful group of people: Old grandparents, women, young teenage girls, the baby. The only younger man was my uncle. I wonder whether the soldiers felt any

guilt that they had attacked us as if we were some dangerous armed enemy.

The soldiers came with a pick-up truck and ordered us to climb in.

It is strange, but I felt relief. I was surprised that I felt that way since I always so dreaded the thought of being captured. But I was so tired of running, of being a fugitive, of fighting for my life. I was tired of the constant minute to minute incredible fear of being caught. We tried everything we could to save our lives. But now we will no longer have to make decisions which will determine the course of our fate. I felt that I was giving this responsibility over to G-d and I thought: "Do with my life whatever you want."

I could never have imagined what is awaiting us; I could never have imagined that from the nine of us, in a matter of a few weeks, I will be the only one who will still be alive. So at the moment I felt relief.

The soldiers drove us back to the town of Nyitra, unloaded us in the courtyard of an official building -- most probably the police station -- and ordered us to climb down the stairs into the cellar. The cellar had a long dark corridor and off of it were a few dark cells. We were put in one of the cells where there were a few Jewish prisoners already. There were no windows, only a dim light

bulb was burning. Two long wooden tables stretched the length of the room and next to them on each side, long wooden benches.

We had no food with us, and we were not given any. My mother begged from the other Jews who had been taken from their homes, and therefore had some supplies with them. It was so hurtful for me to see my mother begging, but she could not bear for her family to be hungry and, she put aside her pride.

Since there were only a few people in the cell at the time we were brought in, there was room for my grandparents and for my mother to lie down on the narrow benches. The rest of us slept that evening sitting, putting our heads on the table. From the next day on more and more captured Jews arrived. The place got very crowded. There was no room anymore for my mother and for my grandparents to lie down. My mother's legs were swollen and hurting. My sister Evi and I gave over our places on the bench to her so that she could stretch out her aching legs. The others did the same for my grandparents. When evening came, we sat on the floor, squeezed together, and dozed off in this sitting position. Around midnight the door opened with a bang and a few soldiers came in. They looked around, then pointed and called to some men to follow them outside. A few minutes later we heard the agonizing

screams of pain as those Jewish men were beaten and stabbed repeatedly.

We sat terrified and silent; nobody dared to whisper a word.

When those men were returned to our cell, their heads and bodies were covered with blood. The anguish of their families is impossible for me to describe. They tried to bandage them with whatever rags they had. They were helpless; they could not ease the pain of their loved ones in any way.

From that time on, we lived in terror, dreading the night to come. Our guards could torture us as they pleased, they did not have to account to anyone.

The following night the soldiers came again. Again they selected a few men and the torturing began. And they came again the next night, and again the next, every night during our stay at this place. We were totally helpless, so defenseless; our only refuge was to pray. And I prayed as evening came, "Please G-d don't let them select my grandfather or my uncle."

Today how can I possibly expect anyone in the free world to understand or even imagine our horrific fear of our guards? How can I expect anyone to feel the atmosphere of terror as we sat

squeezed together in that dimly lit cell frightened that one of our loved ones will be tortured next by those sadistic, evil humans?

During the day we were allowed to go out into the corridor. I sat down at the foot of the steps, leading to the outside world, from where I was able to see a small patch of the sky. It was so blue and I imagined how the sun was shining brightly up there, its rays splashing the inner courtyard with brilliant sunshine. But it was so dark where I was.

Sometimes a young man would sit down next to me and we would talk. Even in this dungeon, in this horror-filled place, I was still able to look forward to and enjoy when he would come to talk to me. I still had the normal feelings of a young girl. Today, I find this both amazing and inexplicable.

After about a week, there was no more room to bring in newly captured Jews, so they transported us - the earlier arrivals - to a detention camp in the town of Szered.

The camp was enclosed with barbed wires; our guards were Slovak soldiers. There were many wooden barracks, like stables where horses and cows are usually kept, but these were built for us Jews. We were not considered to be human beings, so we were housed like animals. So many of us were jammed in each barrack

- where a thin layer of straw covered the floor from wall to wall - that all of us were pushing and shoving to secure a small spot for ourselves where we could lie down. Our family felt lucky that we were able to stay together. The little area on the floor that we grabbed the first minute of our arrival was our only place as long as we stayed in Szered.

Strangers, - men, women,- slept next to each other. It was so embarrassing to get undressed, to change our clothes for the night, with the men next to us, around us. Still, I thought, at least here we can stretch out on the floor for the night.

The next day we learned the rules of the camp. We were allowed to leave the barracks during the day and walk around, within the boundary of the fences. We were fed from a soup-kitchen and although it wasn't much, at least we did not have to beg for food from fellow prisoners. There were different workshops set up and everybody had to find work. Old people and children could stay in the barracks. I found work in the embroidery workshop where different kinds of needlework had to be done. I always liked to do needlework so I was satisfied. Strange how one submits to one's fate so quickly. I thought that although we have to sleep on the floor and we have to stand in line to get our food which was so little that we were hungry most of the time, at least

we are together. I thought: This is not the worst place to wait out the end of the war.

I soon learned otherwise.

The second night, a short time after we went to sleep we were awakened by the shrilling sound of whistles and the loudspeaker ordering everyone out of the barracks. Awakened from our sleep, we were so confused, nobody knew what was happening. Soldiers burst into the barracks and chased us to the square in the center of the camp. In the midst of our panic, and our running, our family tried desperately to stay together.

The square was lit up with floodlights; the loudspeaker was blurting out the orders: "Start running, run in a circle." The soldiers were standing on the side with their vicious dogs barking at us and with their rifles pointed at us. We ran around in a circle, which had no end or beginning and the loudspeaker was shrieking "faster, faster," when suddenly a new order was given: "Everyone turn around and run in the opposite direction."

Throngs of people still continued to run forward, while the others started backwards. We bumped into and knocked each other down, we stumbled and fell. The orders to change direction, "Run backwards, run forwards" came more and more frequently, and the soldiers started shooting blindly into the crowd. Many of us were

trampled by the others or were shot by the bullets. We were running like the animals in a circus, as their masters crack their whips. This time it was the soldiers' bullets that were popping. And the soldiers were laughing, relishing the sight of the terrified Jews running.

Some hours after this insane running, running in circles, we were ordered back to the barracks. By then I was separated from my family and as I walked back alone I dreaded the thought that I might not find any of them there.

One by one members of my family came back to our barracks, but so many others did not.

The next morning I went to my workplace, a spacious room, where many women and girls were working. Often some soldiers came in and walked up and down in the room, watching us work.

A young girl about sixteen was working at the same workbench as I was. I remember her so well and see her to this day clearly. She had thick dark hair, a beautiful peachy complexion, she was very pretty. She spoke with a soft voice, her dark eyes were always smiling. Everything about her was so refined, so graceful. I remember her name and it will stay in my mind forever. We talked sometimes, so when one morning she did not come to work I was anxious to know why. I asked about her and was told that the

previous night one of the soldiers took her to their barracks and she was raped all night by the soldiers. She stayed out of work only for a day - working was a must - but when she came back, she was not the same person as two days before. From then on she did not talk, did not look at anyone. Her face had become so tormented, she looked as if she was not normal anymore. Later, she was shipped with the rest of us to Auschwitz. I heard after the war, that she had survived.

The soldiers came into our workshop many times each day. We lowered our heads and naively we wanted to believe that if we don't look at them, they won't see us.

We were so vulnerable. There was no law to protect us, no place to turn to complain. The mothers were terrified for their daughters. Our life was a constant fear, a constant mental agony.

I don't remember exactly how long we were kept in Szered - about three weeks - when rumors started circulating in the camp that soon deportations will begin to a place named Auschwitz. There were unreal sounding rumors about gas chambers where people are taken in the belief that it is a bath-house where they will

take a shower, and where instead of water, gas comes from the showerheads.

We feared the brutality of our guards in Szered, but we feared the unknown place even more.

A few days later the rumors of the deportations became a reality.

One early morning, guards ran into the barracks, ordering us to gather our belongings in a hurry because we are leaving the camp. Shoving and beating, they chased us out of the barracks in the direction of the railroad tracks where a convoy of wagons - railroad cattle cars - were waiting.

As the hundreds of people in the camp were running in a big commotion, a lot of us had the same idea: When we pass by an empty barrack - from where the people were driven out already - we would sneak in and hide there until the transport leaves. We were hoping that in the chaos, the guards will not notice us.

My mother, my sister and I were still able to cling together, but we lost the rest of our family in the running crowd. The three of us ran into one of the barracks. We knew that it is only a question of a day or two until the next transport will leave, but we still had the urge to do something to save ourselves, to gain time, albeit for one

more day. The will to live was so strong in us that rational thinking left us and we believed a miracle could still happen.

The guards pushed as many people as was possible into the cattle cars and when there was no more room, the rest were sent back to the barracks. When we knew that the transport had left, we who were hiding, went back to our places. To our happiness we found the rest of our family there; they had also been hiding in one of the barracks. Along with the joy we felt at seeing each other, there was the awareness of the next transport which was sure to come. But every moment that we could still be together was precious.

As we suspected, a couple of days later the cattle cars were waiting for us again. Once more we tried to hide in an empty barrack, but this time there were fewer people left in the camp so we could not elude the guards and they drove us out of our hiding place. My mother, Evi and I were together, but in the mad race to hide we got separated from the rest of the family once more. Were they able to hide one more time and were they shipped to Auschwitz a few days later? Were they on the same transport as us but in another cattle car? Were they together with my mother and sister in their final moments as they were gassed? I will never

know! I never saw or heard of any of them again. What I do know today is, that from the camp in Szered everyone was deported.

We were marched to the railway tracks in the vicinity of the camp and were ordered to climb into the wagons. As we were about to enter, I saw my mother handing a postcard to one of the guards asking him to mail it. She must have written it earlier and addressed it to: Vacy Istvan (Ervin's Gentile name) Katona Janos ut 35, Budapest. On the postcard she asked my brother in coded words to try to rescue us. She wrote in Hungarian, translated, it read: "Try to send us a doctor because we are all very sick. Maybe a good medicine could still help, that we could meet again." Even at that point, she did not want to give up the fight for our lives. She ended the postcard, "I send kisses to you with tears in my eyes."

Shockingly, the guard did mail the postcard. Ervin, (Vacy Istvan) received this card in which our mother said good-bye to him forever and he has it in his possession to this day. As I think about it now, I see how utterly desperate my mother must have been not to realize that this postcard could cause the arrest of her son.

There were more and more people jammed into our wagon, until there was only room for us to sit on the floor, with our legs

pulled under us. As soon as they could not push any more people in, the doors were bolted from the outside but the train did not start moving for a long time. The three of us huddled together, Evi and I embraced our mother. We did not try to speculate anymore about where we are being taken. All we wanted was to be close to each other, so whatever happens, should happen to the three of us.

It was dark in the wagon and the only way we could tell when it was daytime was through the tiny window in one corner below the ceiling. The air was heavy, the smell unbearable. There was a small pail in one corner for the people to relieve themselves. I went there once, stepping over the people who were packed so close together that I had difficulty finding a little room to take each step without stepping on them. When I got there, I found the pail had overflowed and the people who were sitting close to it sat in the human waste. After this time, through the rest of the journey, I could not bring myself to use the pail again. It was so inhumane, it was so degrading.

We were not given anything to eat or drink. My mother begged for some food from the people around us whenever she saw that they still had some left. She begged not for herself - she did not eat - but for us, her children. I was angry that she was begging for

food. But now that I am a mother myself, I understand her better.

The three of us hardly talked. We did not complain to each other or to G-d; I just wanted to sleep, to get away from this nightmarish reality. I put my head on my mother's shoulder and I slept most of the time. And so I escaped to a nothingness, where I did not have to think or feel anything.

CHAPTER SIX.

It was in the middle of the second or third night (we had lost track of the time) when the train stopped and the doors were suddenly unbolted. We heard unbelievable shouting, it was like humans barking: "Los, Los", "Fast - Fast," "Out, Out" quickly! Later I came to know that the shrieking of "Los, Los" was the every day sound of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

After a few seconds, men in striped suits, with striped berets on their heads, jumped into the wagons. They were Jews, we learned later, who had been in the Lager for a while already; they looked so strange, pale, ghostlike. They did not resemble anything I had ever seen before. They started pushing everybody out, while they kept on shouting, "Los, Los". Whatever else they said, we did not understand. They all shouted in different languages. We must have been told to leave all our belongings because as we grabbed our suitcases the men tore them out of our

hands and threw them on the ground in a pile. At that moment I was sure that we will be taken to the gas-chamber, that we will be killed now. We have to leave everything because we won't need anything anymore, I thought. How could one live without a single possession?

Being pushed, we jumped down to the platform, my mother, sister and I holding on to each other, so that we should not lose each other in the turmoil. We were stunned, confused, disoriented; we did not know what was going on. People were pouring out of the wagons as if those cattle cars would have vomited them out of their bellies.

There was so much noise: The shrill of the loudspeakers, "Los, Los," the children crying, people hysterically screaming out for relatives whom they had lost already. There were flood lights, but all I could see was the swarming of thousands of people.

The only thing that was important to me now was that the three of us stay together. Whatever our fate will be, I wanted to face it together. I could not imagine that I could go on living without my mother and sister.

The order was shouted to form a column, five in a row, and start marching. Everything went so fast! Only a few minutes had passed since our arrival and we were already marching forward.

In our row, besides the three of us, were two other women - an elderly lady with her daughter. The daughter was about my mother's age. They were on one end of the row, close to the trains. Next to them, in the middle, walked my sister holding onto Mother on one side, and I was clinging to Mother from the other side. I was at the end of the row.

Suddenly I heard my mother saying that she sees girls being taken from some of the rows ahead of us. Her voice was so bewildered, she was so horrified. She said: "I am afraid that the girls are being taken for the soldiers' entertainment." Having two daughters, she constantly was afraid of that; this was her nightmare.

I turned to my mother, to hear what she was saying, and I did not notice an SS officer next to me. Terrified, I felt his hand grabbing my dress on my chest as he yanked me out of my mother's arms. He threw me with such force that I stumbled and found myself among a group of girls who were standing a distance to the right. It took me a second to regain my balance and my first thought, my first instinct was to run back. I turned, but in that very same instant, a thought, like a mysterious voice: "Don't run back. You won't find your mother and sister anymore" flashed through my mind like lightening. And as if some invisible hands were

holding me back, I did not move. I stood there bewildered, stunned, and amazed: Is this happening to me, or am I only observing all this? Was I thrown off Earth into the depths of a dark planet? I stood there motionless as if my feet had become rooted to the ground, staring at the direction where my mother and sister had gone but I could not see them anymore. I only saw a human wave which in the floodlights became a sea of indistinguishable shadows marching toward a darkness. It seemed that they were marching into the wide open mouth of a giant beast, disappearing in its darkness forever.

The platform was cleared in a very short time and, so one more Jewish transport was taken care of by the Nazis with their known efficiency.

I looked around and saw that I was among some young girls. They seemed to know each other, or at least each of them knew someone. They were all from Slovakia and they talked to each other in the Slovak language, of which I did not understand a single word. I was so alone in this strange, frighteningly unearthly place. I don't understand how I did not become insane.

The Germans did not waste time, and soon we were marching ahead five in a row, as was the rule of the Lager.

My world now became the dark universe of Auschwitz. I saw the barbed wires and I could not imagine that anything existed behind it. It was as if a nothingness had enveloped this place, which floats in a vacuum; we will float in it forever and ever. It seemed as if we are a people with leprosy, isolated here on this planet called Auschwitz, and the world does not want to have anything to do with us.

As we marched ahead in the silent night, I saw rows after rows of barracks; they looked like huge, dark coffins. The place looked like a vast cemetery.

The only thought in my mind was my mother - the horror she must have felt, when she suddenly noticed that I am not at her side anymore. Her heart must have been torn to pieces! Did she call out for me? Did she run after me? Did she and my sister lose each other because of that? Or was she also so stunned and confused, as I was, that she just kept on marching ahead? Her last words to me were how worried she was for us, her daughters. She must have gone out of her mind when she realized that in a split second I was gone. These thoughts tormented me then and, at these thoughts I feel a stab in my heart even today, so many years later.

We marched ahead and I did not think of anything else, but my mother's agony. She went to her death fearing the worst for me. And from then on she was watching over me.

After a while, we arrived at a brick building. As we filed in, we found ourselves in a cold, empty room. It was lit up, the walls were white, it looked like the entrance to a bath-house. We were about two hundred girls selected that night from the women of our transport, who were judged by the Nazis to be capable of working for Germany. The girls were all young, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three, with a few exceptions: There was a fourteen year old girl, whose two sisters - sixteen and seventeen - succeeded in pulling her with them. And a mother in her early forties, who managed to come with her two daughters.

We stayed in lines, five in a row. The order was shouted: "Everyone undress, fast, completely! Put your clothes in a pile next to the lines." Despite the constant shouting "Los! Los!" "Fast, fast," the undressing began in slow motion. We all were wearing layers of dresses and layers of underwear. We had prepared ourselves, in case our suitcases would be taken away, as it did happen. I took my clothes off slowly, piece by piece, stopping in between, looking around to see what the others were doing - whether they were

leaving the last piece of underwear on. I stopped and many others did, by the last pair. But the shrilling, thunderous, frightening order, echoing in the room, continued "Los, Los! Take everything off."

Standing naked, we were so embarrassed, that none of us dared to look at each other. We all did the same thing: We hunched over and frantically tried to cover ourselves with our arms and hands as best as we could. In the past, I would never show myself naked even in front of my sister. In my embarrassment I kept staring at the floor, when I heard the quiet, desperate voice of the girl next to me ask if I would change places with her sister. They got separated from each other and now she was two rows behind us. (The girls, coming from the part of Slovakia which once belonged to Hungary, all spoke the Hungarian language more or less, so when the girl next to me saw that I didn't understand Slovak, she spoke to me in Hungarian.) I changed places with her sister. It did not matter to me where I was standing. As I got to my new place, I was asked again by one of the girls in that row, to change places with someone, who was either her friend or relative. I moved further to the back, but now I felt a terrible loneliness. Besides all the horrors we shared, I was more miserable by being so alone. Nobody wanted me to be next to her because they all had

someone who they wanted to be with. I knew that soon we would be taken to the shower room, where either water or gas would come from the showerheads. I remembered the rumors we had heard in Szered about the gas chambers. I had no more fear, I was not afraid of dying anymore. But I was afraid to die so alone. All the others will embrace, will hug each other; I will drop to the floor alone, disappearing from this life all alone. At that moment I only wished that I could hold and squeeze someone's hand, while I am gasping for air. My mind was filled with these thoughts and tears were streaming down my face. I was feeling so terribly sorry for myself, when I heard the girl standing next to me asking: "Are you here alone?" "Yes," I answered, and she told me that she is also all by herself. She said: "Let's stay together from now on."

It seemed as if an angel would have said those words to me. I now believe that I was guided to this girl, Lici, by my mother, who was already an angel in Heaven. From that moment on, Lici and I became inseparable; we became Lager-Sisters. It was as if we had known each other all our lives, which was in a sense true. The life we had before we were brought to Auschwitz was non-existent for us anymore. It had disappeared, faded from our memories upon our arrival.

Although Lici and I could not ease each other's hunger or miseries throughout the nightmarish times, we would always try to be next to each other, whether it was during the long hours of standing "Cahle Appel" (being counted) or going into the showers which could have turned out to be the gas chamber. Knowing that I belong to someone saved my sanity. I know today that I could not have survived the Lager without Lici's friendship.

Being so devastated by the thought of dying alone, I had not noticed that ahead of us there were two women - one was standing and the other was sitting. As our line slowly moved forward one was shaving the girls' heads, the second, the hair from the other parts of their bodies. After the girls were shaved, they did not look like living humans anymore. Naked and bald they were moving around like ghosts, bewildered, in a stupor from embarrassment. They all had the same expression: Daze, confusion, shame, humiliation. My turn came and the next minute I was just like them.

I cannot find words to describe our total dehumanization. By now, the Nazis had taken away everything we had: Our families, all our worldly possessions. And by shaving and shearing us they stripped us of our self respect. We felt that we are nothing,

nobody anymore. No one was interested in our names and we ceased to exist being who we were before. We became ghosts in this hellish place. And as if they would have shaved away part of our mind, we stopped thinking and just followed orders.

The two women finished shaving everyone, and we were led into the next room, where I saw the rows of showerheads above us in the ceiling. We stood in line underneath them, Lici and I next to each other, and waited. I stared at the ceiling and waited to see whether water or gas will come. It made me know for the rest of my life how it feels to be face to face with death. Then I saw the first drop of water and I knew, that I am not going to be killed, at least not for now.

Dripping wet from the shower - there was nothing to dry ourselves with - we were ordered to the next room, where some people started throwing some clothes to each of us. We put those rags on as fast as we could. Finally, we were not naked anymore.

I caught a light blue silk summer dress which was a few sizes too big on me. Most of us got only a dress, but I was "lucky", and was also thrown the dirty outer shell of a long black coat with a bright red stripe painted on the back. It must have been worn before me by a now dead prisoner. The coat's lining had been all torn out, when the SS were looking for hidden valuables. Today in

my mind's eye, I see myself looking like a medieval monk wrapped in that big, long, black coat, but at that time I felt lucky that it would give me some warmth. I also caught a square piece of cloth, a bandanna, which I immediately tore into two triangular pieces, giving one piece to Lici, and we both covered our heads. We were the only ones who could cover our bald heads, and that meant so much!

We were dressed now, but we all looked like pitiful, tragic clowns. The dresses were either too big or too small on us. These clothes had been taken away from people brought to Auschwitz in previous transports. The seams and linings were ripped open to see whether money and jewelry were hidden there. And plenty was found!

It was still night when we left the bath-house and were taken to a wooden barrack. On our way - in the distance - I saw a huge fire shooting toward the sky. In the dark of the night I could not see where it was coming from. The fire seemed to be hanging in the air, its flames trying to reach the black skies. I had no idea what this fire was, but something made me look at it constantly. I later heard that, that night they were already burning the bodies of the people from our transport, and among them was my mother and my sister. But I did not know this then. I kept believing that they are in

another part of the Lager, where families are together, and I will see them again soon.

The barrack was long and narrow and there were bunks on three levels consisting of wooden planks. We were told to find places for ourselves. This barrack was empty upon our arrival, so there was more than enough room for everyone. The girls who knew each other huddled together to keep warm and to calm each other. Lici and I ended up alone on one of the bunks and if not for Lici, I would have been all alone that first night in Auschwitz. We hugged each other; at least we had each other. I was so exhausted physically and mentally that despite the cold and the hunger - they had not given us anything to eat yet - I fell asleep.

The next morning we were taken to the "C" Lager - the women's Lager. This time the barrack was already filled with prisoners. Lici and I tried to find a place for ourselves, but we were pushed away by the other girls, who said they are too crowded even without us. We learned early on that in Auschwitz one cannot afford to be timid and somehow we mustered some courage to force ourselves onto the third level of one of the bunks. It was not a small accomplishment, since both of us were shy and timid; I was more so than Lici. Through all the time in the Lager we never really

learned to be aggressive or to fight back; that we survived was a miracle.

Ten girls were on each bunk and the space was so tight that we had to lie on our sides. Five of us had our heads on one end of the bunk, and five on the other end. Our feet were next to someone's face, often kicking it. There was always pulling and shoving with the two blankets that we shared. We were so pressed together that when one of us wanted to turn, because our body could not stand the hardness of the wooden planks anymore, everyone had to turn, whether they wanted to or not. If someone was sleeping she was woken up, which caused a lot of pushing, cursing and often hitting.

The first morning a girl climbed up to my bunk. She had recognized me as we were brought into the barrack. She was from my hometown; we used to live on the same street, but since she was a couple of years older than I and we attended different schools we only knew each other by sight. Still, she was very nice to me. She had been deported to Auschwitz back in May and now had a position in this barrack as one of the Stubendienst, the helpers of the Blockälteste. Each barrack had one Blockälteste, a Jewish girl whose job it was to carry out the Nazis' orders. Many of these girls had been prisoners for as long as two or three

years and life in the Lager made them very cruel, often times tyrannical toward their fellow Jews. There were a few Stubendiensts in each barrack who, among their other duties, brought the food from the kitchen and distributed it. Physically, theirs was a hard job, carrying the huge, heavy kettles from the kitchen which was quite a distance away. But their job came with privileges: They had more food than the rest of us and were able to give extra portions to members of their families and to their friends.

The Stubendiensts ladled the soup into our bowls and they developed an ability to quickly glance up to see who is next in the line. According to this, the ladle either contained lots of potatoes in the sandy water, or it contained only the sandy water, with hardly any potatoes in it.

The girl from my hometown brought me a bowl of soup full of potatoes. But, when I tasted it, and felt that it was also full of sand which was grinding under my teeth, I could not swallow it. She told me: "In a day or two, you will be so hungry that you will get used to it and you will eat it."

At that moment the soup meant nothing to me. All I wanted was for her to tell me where my mother and sister had been taken. "Where are they now?" I asked her. In Auschwitz no one cared to

spare one's feelings so she simply said to me: "Did you see the fire last night? That is where they are."

I did not believe her!

She told me that I could come and stay with her on her bunk in another part of the barrack, where all the Stubendiensts stayed. I went with her and saw, that instead of ten, only the two of us would share a bunk which had a feather quilt for a mattress, pillows, and another feather quilt for a cover. These were things that people had brought along and were taken away from them as they arrived in Auschwitz. The girl (I do not remember her name anymore) left for work and I stayed on her bunk alone. I was comfortable but so miserable being alone that after a few hours I went back to where Lici was. Had I stayed there, my fate probably would have been worse. I might not have been shipped out from Auschwitz at the time I was. I might not have survived.

After a couple of days we were transferred to another barrack still in the "C" Lager. By now, each of us had been given a metal soup bowl and a spoon, which became very precious to us; they were our only possessions. I put my bowl and spoon on my chest underneath my dress and kept them from falling down with a belt I made by tearing off a strip of cloth from the hem of my dress.

Our days in the Lager started way before dawn when the sound of a whistle and the shriek of the Blockalteste woke us up and we were driven out to the front of our barrack. There we stood Cahle-Appel (Roll Call) in squads, five deep as did all the other women in front of their barracks. Each Blockalteste counted the hundreds of women from her barrack over and over so as not to make any mistakes. Then the numbers were added together and were given to the SS. If the numbers did not add up to what they were supposed to be, the counting started all over again, until the mistake was found. We stood Cahle-Appel twice a day for hours and hours in the cold rainy Polish autumn weather. Many among us fainted, either from being sick or being weak from hunger. The others who stood near, tried to hold them up so that their head should be counted. Those who fell and were noticed, were taken out from the lines and were sent to the gas chamber.

When the counting was finally over and we went back to the barrack, the Stubendienst distributed our ration of bread - a quarter of a small loaf for each of us - and a ladle of black coffee. The coffee, which was only dark water, contained the chemical called brome and this stopped our menstrual cycle.

From the "C" Lager we were not taken out for work. All day long we were lying on our bunk, squeezed together, hungry and

thirsty, our bodies aching from the wooden planks. Once a day, in the afternoon, we were led to the latrine - a long line of holes in a cement block. We went mechanically when we were told, and then we stood Cahle-Appel again which lasted for hours. We were counted and recounted again and again the second time each day. I don't know what the Nazis thought, where and how we could escape, that they counted us twice every day.

In the evening when we finally got our bowl of soup, I was desperately hoping to get some potatoes in it. After only a few days in Auschwitz, I was not only eating my soup, but also praying: "Please G-d make them drop some potatoes in my soup." This became my everyday prayer.

It must have been our brain's self-defense, in order not to go mad, that our minds grew dull, our memories had faded into a fog and we no longer thought back to our previous life. Nor did we think of the future anymore. Now we only thought about the present, the cold, the Cahle-Appel, our hunger, the potatoes.

We lived in a world where horrors became everyday happenings.

The sound of someone moaning woke me up one night. It would stop for a while then it would start again. As time went on, it became more frequent and sounded like muffled painful screams.

One of the young women was giving birth to a baby. It was almost time for Cahle-Appel when the moaning stopped, but there was no baby crying. To save the mother, the girls who had helped her and had stifled her screams, choked the baby as soon as it was born. Otherwise, mother and child would both have been sent to the gas chamber. The "new mother" then stood Cahle-Appel with the rest of us.

There were also suicides.

We were in Auschwitz a few days when a young mother ran out of our barrack, threw herself against the electrified fence that surrounded the Lager and died instantly. She had given her small children to their grandmother when they arrived in Auschwitz in the belief that they would be taken to a family Lager. Instead, she now learned that the elderly and the children had been taken directly to the gas chambers. She was among the many mothers who did not want to go on living without their children.

Shortly after we were transferred to the "C" Lager selections started. "Selections" uttered in the many different languages of Europe was the most dreaded word in the Lager. It evoked a horrible fear that is unknown to the rest of the world.

It was in our barrack where the most drastic selections of all, the selections of the fall of 1944 were held. Women from other barracks, were brought in daily. There was always "Blockspere" which meant that the barrack was always closed, to prevent anyone from sneaking out to hide in another barrack with family or friends until the selections were over.

The selections began by ordering us to undress and line up naked in a single row on the narrow platform which was about a foot high and ran down in the middle the length of the barrack. It was the same platform that the coffee or soup kettles were placed on at food distribution time. At the selections it was used as a runway, where the line of girls slowly moved forward. Three SS officers were standing at the end of the platform and I learned later that one of the three was Dr. Mengele. They inspected each naked girl and made their judgment whether she was still strong and healthy and capable of doing hard work, or looked weak and ill and was ready for the crematorium. So in a matter of seconds it was decided who will live and who will die.

But health was not always the only rule. If the SS noticed any resemblance between the prisoners, and suspected them of being related, one was surely selected to die. This was one of their savage acts: To tear families apart. They knew that this made us suffer

more than physical torture would. Therefore, relatives learned never to line up close to each other.

I was not afraid of dying anymore and since no one from my family was with me, whom I would have feared to be selected, my only horror was having to parade naked in front of the SS men. I was painfully ashamed of it. We were not allowed to shield ourselves even with our hands.

As we passed in front of the SS men, Dr. Mengele, with a stick in his hand, pointed at some girls, who then had to step off the platform. We all knew what this meant: They had been selected for the gas chamber.

The horror that followed, especially when it was someone's mother, daughter, or sister who had been selected is not possible for me to describe, no matter how I try.

The condemned girls did not go quietly to their death! They cried and begged for mercy to have their lives spared. Their loved ones ran to them, embraced them in their arms and pleaded to be allowed to die together, but they were not allowed to. It was the Blockälteste and the Stubendienst, who had to separate them, who had to pull them apart. It took a couple of people to drag each of the girls sentenced to die out of the barrack as she was fighting, kicking, scratching, screaming curses and screaming for mercy.

When I close my eyes I can still hear them pleading that they are young, strong and able to do hard work. I can still hear their cries which will echo over Auschwitz forever.

The SS men stood nearby and continued the selections as if they did not hear or see anything.

It was then, for the first time, at the first selection, that I did not mind not being with my mother and sister. I thought: G-d spared us from the horrific pain when we would have to witness one of us being dragged to our death. I still refused to admit to myself that my mother and sister were selected, already at our arrival. I still wanted to believe that they were taken to another Lager, to a better place.

The selections continued almost daily. The Nazis were in a frenzied hurry to feed the crematoriums before the war would come to an end. (A few weeks later two of the crematoriums were blown up by sabotage.)

Having been in Auschwitz only a short time, Lici and I were still in good physical condition, and we both passed all the selections.

At the end of October, the selections in our barrack stopped and those of us who still remained were told that we will be taken to the showers and then transferred to another part of Birkenau.

The thought that they are fooling us and the showers will turn out to be the gas chamber -- as it happened many times -- flashed through my mind, but since death was so common in the Lager, it left me calm. Lici and I were always together and I knew we would hold hands. I would not die alone.

It was a cold but sunny day -- sunshine was rare this time of the year in Auschwitz -- when we were led by the Blockälteste out of the barrack. She was constantly screaming, shouting: "Los, los" when I suddenly felt a tremendous blow across my face. She hit me so hard, it felt as if she had an iron fist. My ears started to ring and although the sun was shining, everything turned dark in front of my eyes. Besides the physical pain, I was astonished: Why did she do it? Why did she hit me? She had no reason for it. But in this place, nothing had to have a reason. She hit me because it had become a habit to her as it had to most others who were in power, and I happened to be near her.

Miraculously, I was able to continue to walk; I knew I had to if I wanted to stay alive.

This was Auschwitz: Brutality, suffering, death, miracles.

It is still unexplainable to me today why we were taken to the showers since after the showers we were placed into one of the filthiest barracks in the Lager. This was a vast structure, with many

hundreds of women prisoners in it already. Most of them were sick, were vomiting and had diarrhea. They vomited into their soup bowl, then emptied it on the floor or wherever they happened to be and took their soup in the same bowl at food distribution time. There was no way they could have washed it.

It did not take long for many of us new arrivals to become sick also. But somehow I stayed well. It was another miracle; it was my parents watching over me.

The bunk where Lici and I found places for ourselves was again on the third level, among some Russian women. These women were not Jewish; they were either political prisoners or criminals and were robust and very mean. Lici and I were hollered at, and given orders in Russian, which we did not understand. This made them so angry, that they kept on pushing and hitting us.

This place was truly Hell.

Locked in this barrack, we were not taken even to the latrine. Instead, there were three or four big barrels in one corner which were used as latrines.

The smell was sickening!

With hundreds of women in the barrack and most of them having diarrhea, there were always long lines of people on all sides

of the barrels waiting for their turn. I got to the barrel which was taller than me and practically had to climb up it. When I finally sat down on the narrow edge - where many of us were sitting around at the same time - the women who were next in line crowded around the barrel, pushed forward, and shouted: "Hurry, hurry, get down." I was holding on real tight with both my hands, scared that I would be pushed into the barrel, and that I would drown in the human waste. This became a nightmare for me! So, when a couple of days later I heard that those who carry out the full barrels to empty them, are allowed to go to the latrine, I volunteered to do it. But it was not easy. The barrels were huge and extremely heavy. Each had to be carried by two girls for quite a distance from the barrack. It was raining every day now and the ground of the Lager was all mud. Mud was everywhere. Our shoes, a wooden clog -- which had only a front part and no back -- got stuck in the mud and had to be yanked out at every step. This caused the barrels to shake and the contents to spill over.

One day, one of the two girls, who were carrying the barrel in front of me, slipped in the mud, pulling the other girl with her and the whole contents of the barrel spilled over the two of them. We, behind them, had to continue to walk on. I have no idea how those girls were able to clean themselves.

Despite the real possibility that this might also happen to me, I volunteered every day to carry out the barrels. I did it, just to get out of the barrack, and to be able to sit down on a latrine as a human being. We were miserable in this filthy place and suffered during the long hours of standing Cahle-Appel in the cold and rain. The thought that I will have to live like this forever was unbearable.

Some weeks later, toward the end of November, a group of girls, Lici and I among them, were gathered together by the Blockalteste. We did not know what will happen to us, where we are being taken, what the plans were for us. But by this time, we followed orders without any thinking. We could have been selected for the gas-chamber but ours was a lucky group of girls. We were transported to an Arbeits-Lager (Work-Lager). These Lagers, which provided the Jewish slave workers for the Nazis, were scattered all over Poland and Germany.

At that time I did not yet know how fortunate I was to be in that transport, to be shipped out from Auschwitz to a Lager, where life will be harsh, but surviving will be possible. Our group - some of them were the Slovak girls with whom I was deported from Szered - was taken to a nearby railway station. There, the building and the regular passenger trains sitting on the tracks

stirred up in my mind foggy pictures from the past. Am I returning to Earth? - I thought.

After boarding, we found ourselves in the first-class section of an old run-down train where the seats, albeit torn, were upholstered, and where the cabin was divided into small compartments. Since there were no other passengers on the train besides us, there were enough places for all of us to sit.

With our shaved heads, dressed in our ragged, ill-fitting clothes, our soup bowls stuck under our dresses, we looked so comical in this "luxury" surrounding, as if it would be a scene from a tragic-comedy.

I sat down by a window and a short while later when the train started rolling, I saw some houses in the distance. There were some people, men and women, on the fields close to the train tracks. When they saw our bald heads in the windows they stared at us with an expression of fright; they probably thought we were creatures from outer-space.

The houses, the civilian people, seemed so familiar to me, yet so strange, so distant as if I would have remembered them from a previous life, as if I would be looking down at them from another planet. I remember thinking, "Who are those people? Why are they not in a Lager? Why are they not dressed like us? Where are their

guards? Is it possible that they live in those houses in the distance?"

A couple months in Auschwitz and I could not comprehend all this anymore. I believed now, that everyone lives in a Lager, as we do, and there is no other way to live.

We traveled a whole day. The ration of bread that we received early in the morning was long gone and we were not given anymore food that day. Hungry, but intoxicated with the little freedom that we were allowed to move in and out of our compartment, we ran from one window to the other to take in the sight of another world.

It was already evening when we arrived at our destination. The sign on the small railroad station read : "Bad-Kudova."

We disembarked and formed ranks five in a row. There was no screaming "Los, Los"; this screeching sound was left behind in Auschwitz.

It was a cold and rainy evening and we were soaking wet by the time we came to a small Lager. There were only a few wooden barracks and I immediately noticed that they had windows. A hopeful thought passed through my mind: This might be a better place than Auschwitz.

We filed into one of the barracks and stood in line in the long corridor. Off the corridor were the rooms where we were going to stay. This was the first time since my capture that I could call the place where I would be living, a room.

The doors were open and I saw that all of the rooms had five or six bunks on two levels, one for each girl. They had straw-filled mattresses and straw-filled pillows so I could even call them "beds". In each room, there was a long wooden table with benches on both sides where I would be able to sit while eating my bowl of soup, as human beings do. A small iron stove for heating the room (I hoped) was in the corner and there was a regular window! The rooms were all small. They looked so cozy, except one which was huge with many bunks, and it reminded me of Auschwitz.

At the end of the corridor, an SS woman was sitting at a desk, pen and paper in front of her. She asked each of us some questions, and marked down our answers. When it was my turn, she asked me: "What is your name?" "Kupferstein, Agnes", I answered.

"What is" - or did she ask - "What was the name of your mother?" "Grunberg, Anna."

"What is" - or did she say - "What was the name of your father?" "Kupferstein, Isidor."

"In which country were you born?" "Hungary."

As I was answering her questions, I felt I was giving this information not about myself, but about someone whom I used to know many years ago, or maybe in another lifetime. It was so hard, a physical struggle for me to utter my parents' names. I had buried those names deep in my memory; it was painful to dig them out. I had not thought about my family for a while now and it hurt so much to remember.

It seemed so strange to me that we were asked for information about our identities. It seemed strange because it was so human and I was not used to it anymore. Why would she want to know who I used to be? I am not the same person anymore. Why are those statistics being taken? - I wondered. No one is making the Nazis accountable for what they do with us.

The SS women then gave each of us a "necklace". It was a thread, strung through a small round piece of rubber which had our prisoner number printed on. We wore this around our neck. For many years I kept this "necklace", but eventually I misplaced it. Decades later, in 1992, upon my request, I received a letter from the International Tracing Service stating my prisoner number: 86054 and also the exact date, November 28, 1944 of my arrival from Auschwitz to the Bad-Kudova Lager, part of the Gross-Rosen Concentration Camp.

Lici and I were among the last ones in line to get our number, so by the time we went to find a bunk for ourselves, the ones in the smaller rooms were all taken. Only the huge room at the end of the corridor was still empty. Wet, cold, hungry and upset that we were so alone, the two of us lay down in one bunk trying to keep each other warm. This room, which could have held one hundred, only had a few girls besides us.

We had barely slept a few hours when around four o'clock in the morning the whistle sounded and the Lager Elteste called for Cahle-Appel. This time, instead of outside in the cold, it was held in the corridor of the kitchen barracks. After receiving our bowl of black coffee - with the brome in it - and the ration of bread for the day, the same as in Auschwitz, the Lager Elteste divided us into work units.

My unit was led by a few guards out of the Lager and up to a nearby mountain. Our job was digging trenches that I assumed were in preparation for the German soldiers to fight their enemies in case the front would move deeper into Germany.

An icy drizzle with blowing winds was constant as we worked all day still wearing the clothes we had received in Auschwitz: The flimsy dresses, no underwear, our bare feet in wooden clogs. It is unexplainable to me how we did not become deathly sick.

Frozen, we returned to the Lager in the late afternoon. There was roll call again and finally we could line up for our bowl of soup. Here, too, the girls who distributed the soup used the same skilled technique as their "sisters" in Auschwitz. Since the potatoes sank to the bottom of the kettle, they stirred the soup so the ladle would be full of potatoes for their relatives and friends. For the rest of us, they gave the liquid from the top with barely a potato in it. I prayed as I did in Auschwitz: "Please G-d, move their hands, so that there should be some potatoes ladled into my soup."

That evening, Lici and I were alone in that big room; the few girls who had slept there the night of our arrival had found places somewhere else. Lici was sick - she had dysentery - and was in a state of complete apathy, but I was determined to find a place among the others and not be isolated from them. Going from room to room, I noticed an empty bunk. It belonged to a girl who was working the night shifts. She was in the Lager with her mother; their bunks were next to each other. I asked the mother if she would let me sleep there, since I would be leaving for my work before her daughter returned. As soon as she agreed, I went to get Lici and the two of us shared the bunk. The mother was startled when she realized that suddenly two girls were taking her daughter's bunk, but she was kind and did not send us away.

During that night Lici and I needed to go to the latrine. Unlike in Auschwitz, we walked out of the barrack and went to the latrine when we needed to, without any guards. I looked up to the dark sky and felt a sort of freedom.

Since Lici was sick, she was allowed to stay in the barrack the next day. When the girl whose bunk we slept in (unfortunately I had forgotten her name) came back from work in the morning, she found Lici sleeping in her place. But she felt sorry for us, that we were so lonely, and decided to share the bunk with her mother so that we could stay.

There were four sets of mothers and daughters in our Lager: Mrs.D. with her two daughters were in another room. The other three each with a teenage daughter were in our room. Having these mothers around, filled me with such warm, secure feelings, as if I would belong to a family.

During the day, working in the mountains in the cold and rain -- it was raining constantly -- all I thought about were the evenings, when I will return "home." Our room in the Lager became my home, and I hardly ever thought about my life, my home before. I totally accepted this miserable life, and I accepted that I will live like this until the day I will die from the cold or from the hunger.

Our Lager Elteste, Rita was in charge of us. She was the only Jew who had a position. There were no Kapos, Blockaltesters, or Stubendienst as in Auschwitz. Besides the Kommandant, a German woman, there were SS officers and SS men and women who were our guards.

Rita was a pretty Polish girl in her early twenties. She was always neatly dressed in skirts and pullovers, her hair was colored golden blond, she wore makeup and she must not have been deprived of food, because she was on the heavy side. She distanced herself from the prisoners and had a close relationship with the Germans, especially with the Kommandant. But Rita was not mean to us, and while her friendship with the Germans was to her advantage, we also benefitted from it. She lessened our suffering when she was allowed by the Kommandant to hold Cahl-Appel in the kitchen barrack instead of outside in the sub-zero winter weather. She was also permitted to let those who were sick stay out of work for a few days. I believe that it was because of Rita, that survival was possible in this Lager.

Some time passed. The rain turned to snow, and we stopped working in the mountains. I was assigned to another work unit. We started out for our workplace in the early dawn, when it was still dark. It was a bitter cold winter day - a day when now I would

hear an announcement on television that unless it is an absolute must, one should not venture out for danger of frostbite. They would announce this, although today we can bundle ourselves in heavy winter clothes. But then we were marching in the blizzard, scantily dressed in the summer dresses - the rags which had been thrown to us in Auschwitz.

We marched through a deserted countryside. Fierce wind bit our faces and whipped our bodies like truncheons. The road was covered with a blanket of thick, icy snow and the soles of my wooden clogs froze to the snow. I had to twist them at every step I made to dislodge them. The twisting and jerking made the thin wooden edge of the clog cut deeply and painfully into the front of my bare feet. Pieces of icy snow stuck to my soles until I felt as if I were walking on ice skates. My ankles wiggled, and I was wobbling because chunks of snow broke off from the bottom of my clogs. From the pain and from my despair, tears were flowing from my eyes, and they froze to my cheeks. I knew I would freeze to death by the end of the day, if we would be forced to work outside.

I had not been thinking of my mother and sister lately. I had heard so much about the gassing of the people in Auschwitz, that my illusion that they are in a better Lager was gone, and my mind

chose to forget about them. Shivering in the cold and hurting with every step I took, made me think of them. I thought about my mother's aching legs, how she would not have been able to endure this agony. I was now grateful that she and my sister were in heaven and they don't have to share this suffering with me.

I do not know how long we marched. Two hours, three hours, for us it was an eternity. It seemed it would never end. And then when we stopped we were in front of a white structure, painted white to blend in with the snow. It was a factory, a sheltered place, where aircraft parts were manufactured. It was our new work place!

The next several weeks, both Lici and I worked in this factory. Here the many machines were operated by French and Italian prisoners of war. The Jewish girls had the job of sweeping around the machines to keep the floors clear from the debris which had fallen off during the manufacturing process.

Each of us was assigned to work around certain machines. It was forbidden for us to accept anything from the other prisoners; we were not allowed to talk or even to look at them. Our German guards were circulating among the machines constantly; we never knew when they were close by.

I kept on sweeping all day, my eyes always on the floor. When noon came, the men - the political prisoners - stopped their machines; it was lunch time for them. To our surprise, our guards allowed us to receive a bowl of soup, filled with potatoes and vegetables, the same as the men were getting. Every day, as long as we were working in the factory, we received the extra bowl of soup.

A couple of weeks later, our dresses- the rags- that we got the first night in Auschwitz, which I had never taken off, day or night since, were exchanged for the gray and blue striped uniforms of the "Haftlings", the Jewish prisoners in German Lagers. Our dresses and our underwear - the first pair of underwear since I arrived at Auschwitz - were made from a coarse cotton material and were more or less the proper size for each of us. Our clogs were exchanged for shoes. Although these also had a wooden sole, they had a laced-up canvas top which made it easier to twist them off from the ground, when they stuck to the frozen snow.

Having a pair of shoes instead of the clogs, our march to and from our workplace became somewhat less torturous, and I was able to look at the surroundings. What I saw was a beautiful winter scene, a picture-postcard view around me. Everything was covered with brilliantly white snow - the beautiful, pristine snow,

which caused so much pain for us. There were small houses in the far distance. In the early dawn on our way to work, and in the evenings on our way back to the Lager, I saw lights in those houses. Is it possible that families live in houses? Is it possible that families live together? I kept looking at those little houses with the lights in them and I envisioned happy parents and children together in a warm, cozy home. Pictures from the past flickered in my mind, but now it seemed that they were never real. Were they only a dream?

The men in the factory -the prisoners of war - felt sorry for us Jewish girls. One day, as I was sweeping around the machine of an Italian prisoner, I felt that he was staring at me. I was afraid to look at him, since we were not allowed to do that, but his stare was so intense, that for a second it made me look up. As he caught my eye, he quickly glanced at a spot on his machine, nodded his head slightly, and walked away. After he left, I went closer to his machine and where he had pointed with his eyes, I saw a hollow space. In there was a whole ration of bread! My heart started beating wildly. Should I dare take it? A guard might see me. Besides, did he leave it for me? I was terribly afraid but so tempted! I swept and swept around the machine, I did not know what to do. But my hunger was stronger, and won over my fear. Suddenly,

without consciously knowing what I was doing, faster than any speed on Earth, I grabbed the bread and hid it underneath my dress on my chest. Seconds later, the Italian came back - he must have observed me from a distance - again nodded his head slightly, and then I knew that he had wanted me to have it. From then on, he often left a ration of bread at the same spot. Every time I took it, I knew what danger of punishment I was in, what serious risk I was taking, but my hunger was so painful, I was not able to resist it. Lici and the other girls also received some food from the political prisoners, whose machines they were cleaning around. I am certain that it helped us survive.

While the bread from the Italian nourished me physically, mentally I was nourished with the encouraging words of a French prisoner. He would often pass by me and whispered to me in broken German, that our misery would soon be over. He would murmur names of German cities and I knew he was telling me how far the Russian and Allied forces had reached into Germany. I hungered for his words, almost as much as for the extra bread from the Italian. It never entered my mind to get to know the names of those two prisoners - those were times when it seemed natural to me that people were nameless -- but I will never forget them.

The weather continued to be below freezing, the biting cold did not let up. During our long march to work, I forced myself to think about the extra bowl of soup, the extra portion of bread and the French prisoner's reassuring words which somewhat deadened the physical pain. Then one evening as we returned from work to the Lager, we were told that we wouldn't be going to the factory anymore.

At this time a certain number of girls were needed in the kitchen. I, with a few others, were chosen for the job of peeling potatoes and vegetables. I was really lucky ; it was the best job possible. I didn't have to march for hours in the harsh winter weather, I had an extra bowl of soup, and while we were peeling the vegetables we were allowed to eat as much of them as we wanted to.

But this good fortune lasted only a few days.

Mrs. D., the mother who had her two daughters with her in the Lager was also working with us. She wanted this job for one of her daughters. In order to accomplish this, she had to push out one of the girls already working there. She picked me because she knew she could not do it to any of the other girls. She started to find fault with the way I peeled the vegetables. True, I had never peeled a potato before but, except for her, nobody cared. She

complained to the others that I was too slow, and a few days later I was told not to come to work anymore. The next day, her daughter was working in my place. To this day, I am amazed that I survived those times.

As was the rule of the Lager, the girls without work lined up early in the morning and the LagerElteste enlisted them into new work units. We never knew where or what our new job would be. Would we have to work outside in the freezing weather? Or would we be lucky to get into a unit which worked in a sheltered place? Would it be a place where we would have an opportunity to get some extra food? Not knowing any of this, the best thing was to try not to get into any of the work units at all. And so, whenever a new work unit was being assembled, the struggle of trying to get to the end of the line started among the girls. While at food distribution times Lici and I always found ourselves at the end of the line, when it came to being counted into work units, we always ended up at the front. The fast ones among us sneaked to the end hoping that not all of us would be needed for work at this time. There were girls who in this manner were able to miss work many of the days, which in that blizzard winter may have meant the difference between life and death. As for me, I never tried to change my

place. I left it to fate, thinking that I might end up changing for the worse.

My next work place was at the Germans' canteen, where the food for the German guards and for the political prisoners who worked in the aircraft factory, was prepared. The canteen was the same distance from the Lager as the factory, the same difficult march every day. Our work was in the cellar, where potatoes and different vegetables were piled up. Our job was to sort out the ones that had started to rot so that they should not spoil the rest. Although it was cold in the cellar, at least we were not out in the blizzard. We were allowed to eat the raw potatoes and vegetables, but it was forbidden to take any with us back to the Lager.

The first day at noon we had a wonderful surprise: We got an extra bowl of soup, full of vegetables and potatoes - the same as was prepared for the political prisoners.

This was one of the better work units!

Lici and I always stood next to each other when a work unit was assembled, so we worked in the same workplace most of the time. But Lici was sick again and she was allowed to stay in the camp. Working for a few days in the canteen, I noticed that when we returned to the Lager in the evening, no one was checking whether we brought any vegetables with us. I decided then to

bring two potatoes back to the camp. I thought we would roast them on the small iron stove in the evening, as I saw other girls doing.

I was now carrying my soup bowl and spoon in a small bag. I had made the bag by tearing off a piece of cloth from the dress I got in Auschwitz at the time it was exchanged for the striped uniforms. Carrying my only belongings in that bag - instead of on my chest underneath my dress - was my first step back to civilization.

I put the potatoes into my bag and although I was scared that they might check us, the prospect of enjoying the roasted potatoes overshadowed my fear. My heart was pounding as we arrived in the evening at the gate of the camp, but as in previous days, we were not checked and that evening Lici and I feasted on the two roasted potatoes.

Since everything went so well, I became more daring. This surprises me today, but I guess hunger can change one's basic nature.

The next day I hid four potatoes in my bag and couldn't wait for the evening to come, to roast them and share them again with Lici.

That evening the guard stopped our group at the gate and asked us whether anyone had brought anything from the canteen. Everybody remained silent. The guard asked us two more times (could it be that she already knew?). During a fraction of the next seconds, ideas raced through my mind. Should I drop the potatoes on the ground? But my bag was tied with a string and I knew that I wouldn't be able to undo it fast enough not to be noticed. I also realized that I will have to tell the truth when they will see the potatoes laying on the ground. Should I just keep quiet, taking the chance that they might not search us after all? But what if they did and they would find them? I was frightened like never before, but it became clear to me that I had no choice but to come forward.

I went up to the guard and told her that I have some potatoes in my bag. She made me follow her into the barrack where the Germans had their offices. As we entered the first room, she told me to wait while she went into the office of the camp's highest ranking male officer.

How can I put into words the fear I felt? It is beyond description of any human feeling. The incredible fear of the Nazis' punishment was torture of tortures itself; it could lead one to insanity. I actually began to physically feel the pain from violent

blows, savage beatings, slappings and kickings, which I knew were waiting for me in the next few minutes. I started to pray. I called to my mother to intercede for me and to beg G-d for the miracle that I should feel no pain, no matter what will be done to me. Then I turned to G-d, and it was now more than praying. I pleaded and then demanded: I wanted to force Him to help me not to feel any pain. I knew that what I wanted was nothing less than a miracle. Was I asking to die from the first blow so that I won't feel any more pain?

From this extremely intense emotion, I was dizzy and shaking with fright by the time I was called into the room where one German officer was sitting behind a desk. Next to him on each side an officer was standing in the familiar, frighteningly powerful pose of the SS -- their arms folded on their chest, their shiny booted legs spread apart. It looked like they were about to jump on me.

In a foggy state of mind, I heard the SS officer behind the desk asking me. "Do you know that it is forbidden to bring any food into the camp?" I must have answered his question but I do not remember how. He told me to put the potatoes on his desk. How I managed with my trembling hands to untangle my bag and take the four potatoes out of it is a mystery for me today but somehow I did it. And he said: "Don't ever do this again."

I stood there waiting for the beatings to begin, when he told me "you can go now." Delirious, on the threshold of consciousness I stumbled out of the room, my legs carrying me mechanically back to the barrack. I knew that my prayers had been heard and a miracle had happened but my mind was not clear enough to determine whether I had been beaten and I did not feel any pain, or whether I had not even been touched? They let me - a Jewish prisoner - go without a single blow after I was found taking potatoes from the German soldiers?

This was a miracle! We know from eye witnesses that the Nazis tortured and killed those who would dare to steal a potato.

I am wondering today: Was I the only one that evening who had hidden potatoes, or was I the only one who came forward with it?

That evening I did not have my bowl of soup. Reaching my room in the barrack, I fell on my bed and sank into a deep redeeming sleep.

Did the others in the room notice that I did not return after work? Was Lici worried? I can't remember talking about it. In the Lager, whatever happened was accepted as part of our condemned life.

I continued working in the canteen for a while longer. As the harsh winter was slowly coming to an end and the snow started to melt, our march to work was not difficult anymore. By working in the canteen I got an extra bowl of soup every noon and I could eat a lot of raw potatoes and vegetables during the day, but I was never again tempted to bring anything into the camp .

In the early part of March, we stopped working in the canteen so I had no extra food anymore. My hunger pains were getting more and more unbearable.

At this time, rumors started circulating that the war will soon come to an end. But the rumors meant very little to me; I could not believe anymore that our suffering will ever end.

The coming of spring brought mild weather but also new miseries for us. Lice, rats and mice invaded our barracks. Our hair which had started to grow back, was now full of lice as were our clothes and bodies. Our straw mattresses and straw pillows were ridden with mice and rats. I felt them as they were racing wildly underneath me at night.

Days passed before a new work unit was assembled where fifty girls were needed. At the sound of the whistle those of us who at the time were not working, lined up and the LagerElteste counted and marked down the prisoner numbers of the first fifty

girls. Lici and I were the last ones in the line, but as usual we found ourselves at the front after the others quickly maneuvered to get to the end. No one wanted to be counted into the new work unit. It was dark when we left the Lager for our new work place and we were still marching when the rising sun revealed the beautiful scenery around us; the lush green fields that spread into the far distance. Seeing the rebirth of nature made me momentarily forget our miseries.

I felt so free on this tranquil, beautiful spring morning that I actually enjoyed our long march to our work site, a railroad embankment where damaged railways had to be repaired. Our assigned job was to carry heavy rocks from the foot of the embankment to the top. We carried the stones all day long, while we had nothing to eat. I had eaten the portion of bread we were given in the Lager during our march in the morning. I was exhausted, and terribly hungry; I had to drag myself on our way back to the camp in the evening. The one bowl of soup didn't ease my hunger and I dreaded the prospect of the coming days.

The next morning on our way to work, the countryside still looked beautiful but it seemed cruel that there should be such beauty in a place where there is so much suffering. The work was hard and my hunger was so painful that by noon I did not know

whether I could last through the day. And then something miraculous happened.

It must be only an illusion, a mirage I thought, when the sight of a half dozen women coming toward us appeared on the horizon. Dressed in their native long cotton dresses, crisp white aprons, and headdresses, they seemed to float above the ground as each carried a big basket on her arm. These were Czech women - as we learned later - so we must have been somewhere close to the Sudetanland. To me it seemed they had come from the faraway Planet Earth, to our planet of misery.

The women approached our guards and offered them one of their baskets full of delicious baked goods, in exchange for being allowed to hand out the rest among us.

I must be dreaming I thought, as I received the rolls and "buchtas" (small coffee cakes). Their aroma evoked memories of a world past, which I was sure was lost to me forever.

The next day at noon, the women came again, their baskets filled with delicacies. The news about this quickly spread in the camp and now the other girls wanted to take our place. When our work unit was called in the morning they also lined up -- this time in front. They would have succeeded in pushing many of

us out, but only those whose number the LagerElteste read from the list were allowed to go.

As long as we were working at the railways the wonderful Czech women came every day, and with their freshly baked pastries they not only eased our hunger but possibly saved many of our lives.

Our job at the railways was finished at the beginning of April, and this was the last time I worked outside the Lager. None of us were taken to work anymore and we no longer had any extra food. Our daily soup got thinner than before; it was now all water, hardly any potatoes in it. My stomach was hurting constantly from emptiness and my dress was getting bigger and bigger on me with each passing day.

Through the winter it was not known to us that next to ours was a camp for political prisoners. Their barracks were far away - we could not see them - but the prisoners were allowed to move around freely on their camp ground. Now that the weather had gotten warmer, they often came to walk near our fences. From them we heard rumors concerning the war. As they passed by, they would call over, letting us know that Berlin was already under siege by the Allies and that the Russian front was very close to us.

Some days we could already hear the sound of their artilleries in the distance.

All this should have made me hopeful, but I was not capable of that anymore. I believed now that we were the only Jews who were still alive. I believed that the Germans will finally surrender and the war will be over, the Allies will go home and so will the Russians. But we will be held in this remote place; there is nobody left who would ever look for us, and we will be condemned to this life until the day we die from sickness and starvation.

By now the memories of my family and my life before had become so remote in time as if they would never have existed. Hunger took over my whole being completely, and the yearning for food was the only thought that I was capable of.

Our days passed in idleness, doing nothing else but searching for and killing lice on our heads and our bodies. Then one morning our guards gave us shovels and ordered us to dig a deep pit across the width of the Lager. Naively, I thought that we are digging an army trench from which our guards will fight the Russians. Instead, we learned, they were making us prepare our own mass grave.

The ditch was completed in a couple of days, and at that time there were rumors that Hitler had committed suicide. But no one was sure whether this was true or not.

Were our guards waiting for an order to kill us but Germany was in such deep chaos that orders could not reach the camps anymore? Did the order come but the Kommandant did not follow it? A few days later, not wanting to risk being captured by the Russians, our guards changed to civilian clothes and fled during the night. The Kommandant stayed.

Cahle-Appel was called by the LagerElteste. The Kommandant who was at her side, still wearing her SS uniform, announced that the war is over and we are free to leave. Despite all the rumors we had heard the last few weeks about the collapse of Germany, I still could not see a way out from the Nazi terror. Now the suddenness and the gripping simplicity of the words of the Kommandant with which she announced the end of the most horrible atrocities in human history, stunned me. It took minutes until I understood and realized that I had survived the Lager. With a few simple words our horror-filled captivity had ended. We were free now. But there was no jubilant celebration. There was only the shattering realization of the irreversible, irreparable crimes against us - the killing of our

parents, our families. A tragedy was left behind and our lives had changed forever.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE TITANIC

On the night of April 14-15, 1912, the RMS Titanic, a British passenger liner, sank after colliding with an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean. The ship, which was considered unsinkable, sank within two hours of hitting the iceberg, resulting in the deaths of over 1,500 people. The disaster was a major maritime tragedy and led to significant changes in shipbuilding and safety regulations.

The Titanic was built by Harland and Wolff for the White Star Line. It was the largest ship in the world at the time, with a tonnage of over 50,000 tons. The ship was on its maiden voyage from Southampton, England, to New York City, USA. On the night of April 14, 1912, the ship was struck by an iceberg, which caused it to sink. The ship's sinking was a major disaster, as it was the largest ship in the world at the time and was considered unsinkable.

The sinking of the Titanic was a major maritime tragedy and led to significant changes in shipbuilding and safety regulations. The ship's sinking was a major disaster, as it was the largest ship in the world at the time and was considered unsinkable. The sinking of the Titanic was a major maritime tragedy and led to significant changes in shipbuilding and safety regulations.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

We were told to march to the kitchen barrack where extra rations of bread and some left-over sugar and margarine were distributed among us. In my soup bowl I quickly mixed the sugar and margarine into a delicious cream and started licking it with my finger. And as I passed through the gate of the camp, the only thing I was happy about was the wonderful relief of the pain of my hunger.

We left the camp, on the road on which we had walked so many times on our way to work and had never seen a single person. Now it was crowded with retreating German soldiers on trucks and on foot. They were weary, their uniforms ragged, but their hatred toward us Jews still did not stop. They recognized our striped uniforms and cursed us, spit on us; I was afraid they will shoot us, since they still carried their weapons.

I had no idea where we were going or in what part of the world we were. Lici and I always stayed close to each other, and just followed our group. And I became frightened of the future and instead of being happy that I had survived, I was scared. What now? How do I start my life now? - were the thoughts in my mind. I realized that Auschwitz had caused the world as I knew it, to disappear forever. I feared the strange new world I was heading toward, where there is not one person to whom I will belong. How will I, who was always so dependent on my family, be able to live alone in this new unfamiliar world? How will I be able to create a new life for myself? How and where will I start? For now, I still had Lici, but I knew that as soon as we reach the Hungarian border, we will have to part since our hometowns were in different parts of the country. I was scared, and dreaded the thought of my future, and of the terrible loneliness awaiting me.

Some time later we came to a highway which was jammed with thousands and thousands of people. German soldiers who had been captured by the Russians were standing in groups surrounded by their Russian guards. It gave me satisfaction to see their scared and humiliated faces -- the Germans who were so mighty, so

mercilessly cruel, and who just a few weeks ago still used their evil power to torture and kill innocent people.

The road was also crowded with political prisoners and Jewish prisoners in their striped uniforms. I slowly realized that there were other Jews who had survived. We began asking each other: "Were you together with anyone from my hometown?" naming the cities we came from. We repeated this question again and again, hundreds of times, to anyone wearing a Jewish prisoner's uniform. We shouted the name of our cities and villages without stopping, hoping that someone knew somebody from that place, hoping that it might be someone from our families. We asked everyone in the striped uniform who walked next to us, or passed us in any other direction, the same question. This was the start of our search for our parents, brothers, sisters, relatives. Seeing that some Jews did survive the death camps, I now had some hope that my father and my younger brother might be alive. I was hoping that my older brother was lucky enough to live through the war as a Christian in Budapest. Maybe I will find them. I had no hope for my mother and my sister. I knew that they were killed the first night we arrived in Auschwitz. That night I saw the people as they were led toward the gas chamber and my mother and sister were among them.

As I am writing this today, I see two pictures in my mind. In both, a huge mass of people are slowly moving ahead, like waves of an ocean. But what a contrast!

In the first picture are people young and old, children and babies. They are frightened; their faces sad, tormented. Everyone is dreading the future, the next moment. Although they are driven, "Los, los," they are reluctant to move ahead; they feel that this is the last road they will be taking.

In the other picture, I again see oceans of people moving on the roads. Their faces are hopeful; the road they are taking is toward a new beginning. But there are no more babies, children or old people. They have not come back; the Nazis have kept them forever.

In the late afternoon we arrived in a German town. We had separated from most of the girls from our camp during our walk, but Lici and I made sure that we didn't lose each other in the crowd. The town was swarming with survivors. Soup kitchens were set up by the "Joint", a Jewish organization, to feed us. School buildings were converted to shelters for us. In the classrooms, straw was scattered all over the floor and we slept on it. We never stopped

asking whoever was around us: "Did you know anyone from my hometown?" We never tired of asking this question.

The next day we continued our walk and tried to find our way back home. Lici and I followed the people whom we heard speaking Hungarian, hoping that we were heading toward Hungary. We wandered many days and stopped in many towns. After a while, we came to a bigger city. Our Hungarian group settled in one of the school buildings and Lici and I followed them. We didn't want to lose them, because they seemed to know the way back to Hungary.

The school building was jammed with people. We could hardly move around. As usual, we asked everyone around us our question: "Did you know anyone from Nyiregyhaza?" (my hometown) I asked. "Did you know anyone from Dunaszerdahely?" Lici was asking. Suddenly a girl turned to Lici and said: "I was in the camp with a woman from Dunaszerdahely and we are still together in a group in another school building. We came here to search for some surviving relatives.

"Who is the women from Dunaszerdahely?" asked Lici.

"Her name is Mrs. Kallos." answered the girl.

It was Lici's mother! As if we would have been fired out of a cannon, both Lici and I started running up and down the staircase,

to find her. Frantically pushing aside everyone in our way, we were weaving ourselves in and out through the crowd, and ran from one room to the other, from one floor to the next shouting Lici's mother's name. I don't know how many times we ran through the building asking everyone if they know her. We ran up and down the floors looking for her and all the while I felt as if I was looking for someone to whom I belong. Thoughts of what a wonderfully secure feeling it will be, to be with a mother again, kept flashing through my mind when suddenly I saw Lici running toward a woman and I saw her throw herself in front of her mother. She clutched and kissed her mother's feet and cried uncontrollably. Mrs. Kallos pulled Lici up, they hugged and kissed, laughed and cried at the same time. The image of this picture of a mother and daughter finding each other will forever be scorched into my memory. People crowded around us and tears streamed down their faces. We cried and thought of our mothers; we knew that hardly any of us will ever embrace our mothers again.

I was standing near Lici and heard her mother say: "Come with me, I am with some women in another building." Lici, seeing her mother again was in a daze. It must have transported her back to her old life which I was not part of. She turned to me and said, "I am going with my mother." It happened so fast! She did not ask

me to come along. There was no goodbye, no hugs; they simply left. Lici's mother did not even know who I was. I was just one of the girls in the crowd. I stood there confused, looking in the direction where the only person I felt I belonged to was disappearing into the crowd. For the second time since my deportation, I was left with no one. There were hundreds of people near me, the sound of many different languages around me, but no one who would say a word to me. I felt as if I were alone in this whole world; I didn't belong to anyone.

I had met Lici on that first awful night in Auschwitz when it must have been angels who guided me next to her, and in a matter of seconds she became my Lager-sister at the loneliest time in my life. The abruptness of our parting made it seem as if the angels were now telling me: The nightmarish life that Lici and I shared on those strange unearthly places, Auschwitz and the Lager is over. They are telling me that the horrors are over and I will soon be home again.

Lici was more than a friend. She took the place of a sister in those darkest days in my life. Without her, I would have been subjected to many more hurts and mistreatment from the others for no other reason than that I was alone. It was the way of the Lager. Knowing that we belonged to each other, helped me to

endure the sufferings and helped me to survive. I will always cherish her friendship.

It was many months later, in the summer of 1945, when I was back in Nyiregyhaza, that I received a letter from Lici through the Joint. She wrote that neither her father nor her only brother had returned from Auschwitz . In a later letter she sent a wedding picture of herself and her new husband, and wrote that she had married Joseph Greenwald, the best friend of her late brother. I did not know at that time, how similar our married names would be when a couple of years later I would be marrying Joseph (Tuli) Greenfeld.

During the two years I lived in Hungary after our liberation, Lici and I exchanged only a few letters, since it took many weeks for a letter to arrive in those days. Our correspondence stopped when I started to spend more and more time in Budapest preparing the required papers for our immigration to America. We lost track of each other, until forty-eight years later, when with the help of the American Red Cross and the Israeli Mogan David, I learned that she is living in Natanya, Israel. I immediately called her on the telephone and she told me she is already a great-grandmother. In 1994, my husband Tuli and I visited her in Israel. I found

her to be a very young looking great-grandmother. We met her family: A daughter and a son and their families. Lici told me, that when her daughter was born, she named her "Agnes" because of me. I realized then, that our friendship had just as deep a meaning for her as it had for me. Our reunion was special, but it would have been happier if not that her husband had passed away just a few months before. I never had the chance to meet him.

When Lici found her mother and they left, I felt a devastating loneliness. Forlorn, I went back to the classroom where the Hungarian group was staying. Being alone, I started to pay more attention to who the girls were, and I met the two Guttman sisters, soon discovering that our hometowns were not far from one another. We also discovered, that our families had known each other in the past; my mother had bought many beautifully embroidered linens at the girls parents' business. This old time connection stirred up feelings which were buried so deep in me during the past year. It felt as if I was waking up from a long dark coma.

Since we were going in the same direction, the sisters and I stayed together from then on. We traveled any way we could,

sometimes jumping on a freight train which would take us a distance, and when it stopped we continued on foot. Still not knowing the way to Hungary, I constantly worried that I might be separated from my group. Once, I was almost left behind as the others climbed up to a horse-drawn wagon. By the time I got to the wagon, it seemed there wouldn't be room for even one more person. I was terrified that they might leave without me. With a courage and aggressiveness unfamiliar to my nature, I jumped up to the already moving vehicle and pushed the others aside to make room for myself.

Three weeks had passed since our liberation when we finally reached a border city of Hungary. Although I was never in that part of the country before, I knew that from here on I would not be lost, I will find my way home.

What amazes me today, and even makes me angry, is that I felt no hostility toward this country which treated us so horribly. Instead, I felt I was home again.

As I was crossing the border back into Hungary, I suddenly realized that during the past year I never knew when our holidays were nor did I give it any thought that the food I ate was not kosher. I promised myself at that moment, that I will again be an observant Jew and I will keep the dietary

laws. This was not an easy vow to make and to keep in the post war years. Most of us who survived rebelled against our religion, against G-d, who would permit such devastation to happen to us and to our people. Being observant, I was regarded as peculiar among the survivors, but for me it was a connection to the life I had before. I also felt I must do this for the memory of my parents who were murdered for their religion.

I was now in Hungarian territory, however, getting back to my hometown was not simple. The country was in complete disorder: the transportation was chaotic. Few trains were operating and those which did, had no schedule. No one knew when the trains would be leaving or where their destination would be. The Guttman sisters and I stayed at the train station and waited until we learned that one of the freight trains - which were carrying coals in their open wagons- probably will be heading for Budapest. The coal was piled high and we climbed on top of it not thinking that this could be dangerous. Russian soldiers were everywhere and we did not know that as girls we had to be afraid of them. Nothing frightened us now that the Nazis were gone.

We traveled a whole night, the train making many stops, jerking and jolting every time it started out again. Trying desperately not to slip off, I dug my hand into the pile of coal, but there was

nothing to hold onto except to grab a chunk of it which slid with me every time I slid. It was already morning when we arrived in Budapest. The sun was shining brightly over the city which, while in the Lager, I believed didn't exist anymore. It seemed then that it never did.

The train pulled into the Nyugati (the West side) railway station, one of two main stations of Budapest. It was less than a year before (how short in time - or was it in another lifetime?) that I had fled this city with my mother and sister, trying to save our lives in Slovakia. We left then from the dreaded Keleti (the East side) station and now I had come full circle. I came back, but without my mother and my sister. I felt I had abandoned them in Auschwitz. That I had taken them there and left them. I felt guilty that I came back.

As the representatives of the Joint welcomed us survivors at the train station, my thoughts wondered back to those dreadful times when the Hungarian gendarmes were swarming the station to catch the desperate Jews who were trying to escape.

The Jewish gymnasium (high school) was converted to a shelter for us. It was our receiving center where we provided our identification so people could search for surviving family members. The school building was filled with boys and girls in their late teens

and early twenties who had returned. The lucky ones returned with a sister, a brother, a cousin. But most of them came back all alone. Was there anyone with a mother, a father? It was so rare; I did not see any.

Budapest was the only city in Hungary where there was some chance for Jewish families, parents and children to survive, either in the Swedish protected houses or in some of the so-called "Jewish Houses." Back in the summer of 1944, the leaders of the Jewish community had negotiated with the corrupt Germans - Eichmann himself - offering huge amounts of money for the safety of the Jews of Budapest. They were hoping that while the negotiations were going on, the deportations would be stalled, precious time would be gained, and in the meantime the war might come to an end. Still, thousands were killed in Budapest when in October of 1944 the Arrow-Cross party, the most rabid Jew-hating group of Hungarians, came to power. The mob, led by their leader Ference Szalasi, drove the people out from many of the "Jewish Houses," lined them up and machine-gunned them alongside of the bank of the Danube River. Many were thrown still alive, into the icy waters.

I was desperate to look for any surviving relatives. I wondered about my uncle Bizi, my father's older brother, who with his family used to live in Budapest. Were they able to survive?

I immediately started out toward their apartment. It didn't seem real that I was walking on the familiar streets where I had been so fearful the year before. I now walked in my striped "Haftling" uniform, and the strange looking shoes on my feet, which I am sure were never before seen outside of the Lager. Everyone could tell that I am a Jew, but I was not afraid now.

My uncle and aunt and their four sons were alive and so I found my first relatives. They asked about my mother and sister, knowing that we left for Slovakia together. I told them: "We were taken to Auschwitz and they died there." I was not asked any more questions, and we did not talk about how I survived.

One can only imagine my extreme happiness when I learned from my aunt and uncle that my older brother, Ervin, was alive and that he was back in our hometown, in Nyiregzhaza. They also told me that my cousin, Ilonka, had survived the war in Romania and that she is in Budapest, staying in the apartment where my grandparents used to live.

I wanted to rush to see Ilonka, but my aunt insisted that we first shop for a new dress, some underwear and a pair of normal

shoes. I did not understand her. Why would I need all these new things? I had a dress and a pair of shoes to wear. As soon as I got the new clothes, my aunt threw away my lice-infected "Haftling" uniform. I kept my bag with the soup bowl and the spoon. I did not want to part with them; I felt as if I would still need them.

The news that my brother had survived and that Ilonka was in Budapest brought back memories and made it seem that my old life was slowly returning. Ilonka was the daughter of my mother's oldest sister and we had lived in the same town while I was growing up. Although she moved away when she got married at the age of seventeen, she very often came for long visits with her husband and her baby, Tomy, with whom I used to love to play. Ilonka's tragedy started a month before the deportations. She and her family had come to our town to be with her parents after the Germans took over Hungary. Shortly after they arrived, her young husband suddenly became ill and within a week passed away. Ilonka fled to Budapest, just before the Jews of the city were moved into the ghetto, hoping that her parents and five-year old Tomy would follow her. But her little son was taken with his grandparents to the ghetto and later shipped to Auschwitz where they perished.

On my way to meet my cousin, I thought of the summer before, when we were living in this city as Christians so fearfully, so haunted. How sad my mother was when Ilonka left for Romania. How much she missed her. I couldn't wait to see her again.

In the first few minutes when Ilonka and I met, warm, wonderful memories from years past rushed into my mind. But they disappeared in seconds, and sadness took their place knowing how much we both had lost in a year's time. There were no tears, nor was there joy, just the realization that the life we had before was gone forever. Ilonka asked me about my mother and Evi and once again my answer was simple: "They did not come back". We did not talk about them anymore, nor did we mention her parents or her little boy Tomy. We buried those who died in the concentration camps with the simple sentence: "They did not come back."

During the course of the next couple of years I spent a lot of time with Ilonka. She was like a wonderful older sister to me. We were together for months at a time, but to this day neither of us knows the details of what we went through and how we survived; our survival was stated simply by our presence.

On my first night in Budapest I stayed with my cousin Ilonka at our grandparents' bombed out apartment. The bedroom had a direct hit from a cannon shell, which happened while the

Russians were battling the city. The front wall was gone, wide open to the outside. Bricks and mortar were scattered all over the room; we stepped over them, and it didn't enter my mind that this might not be an ordinary sight. But for the first time since my capture in Slovakia, I slept in an ordinary bed with a regular mattress, fluffy pillows and covers. Ilonka asked me to stay with her in Budapest and it was wonderful to know that I could be with her. She represented to me the adult figure I longed for so much since, she had been married and had a child before. However, I was anxious to go to Nyiregyhaza to be with my brother, Ervin.

From Ilonka I learned that her younger brother David and my mother's nineteen year old brother, Matyu also survived the war and that together with Ervin, they were renting an apartment in Nyiregyhaza. How happy I felt knowing that some member of our family have survived. I will not be all alone! Ilonka gave me their address and I said good by to her. I went back to the school building and found that the Guttman sisters were still there. That day we set out for the final part of our return to our hometowns. We traveled by train and it didn't occur to us to purchase a ticket. The rules of a civilized world were still foreign to us. By evening the train stopped at Debreczen, a city fifty kilometers from my destination. Since we were told that we wouldn't be going any

further until the morning, we got off and lay down for the night on the platform next to the train. I used my bag with the soup bowl in it as a pillow. Sleeping on the bare platform seemed to me a very natural thing to do. Early the next morning, we reboarded the train and about an hour later we arrived in Nyiregyhaza. The Guttman sisters had to travel somewhat further.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

Getting off the train and stepping down on the ground of my hometown, I felt victorious! I came back! I felt, as if I was returning from my escape to Budapest. What happened after that - Auschwitz, the year of horror - for the moment, disappeared from my mind.

It was early morning, the town was still sleeping, only the robins were up, chirping. The rays of a waking sun were promising a beautiful day. Contrary to the time when I so fearfully left the city on the side roads, I now took the main street - lined with springs' blossoming trees - in the direction of our house. My mind was filled with illusions. I pictured my mother and father waiting for me in the doorway, just as I had left them a year ago. I felt as if time had been at a standstill, frozen for the past year. My feet were almost dancing as I walked on the same street where I used to

come and go every day to my tutor while studying for my graduation tests. I was swinging my bag back and forth - in it my soup bowl and spoon - just as I used to do with my briefcase. I wanted to rush to get to the top of our street and shout in the air so loud that my parents would hear me even while I am still far away from them: "I am coming home! We made it, we made it! We survived those evil times!" And then I arrived at the intersection where I had to change directions to get to the apartment where my brother now lived with David and Matyu. Turning the corner, the illusion of my going home suddenly disappeared. I was confronted with the reality that the short distance down the street to the apartment is the road leading to my new life, different from what I used to know. A life without parents, a life where our past will be a faraway memory. The nightmare of Auschwitz will be put in the darkest corner of my mind, but it can never be erased from there.

When I reached the address I was given in Budapest, a middle-aged woman - the housekeeper- opened the door. I told her "I am Ervin's sister." She took this very matter-of-factly and she let me in. I entered a comfortable apartment, nicely furnished with a combination of the few pieces of furniture each of the three boys had found in the former home of their families. Ervin, David and

Matyu were not home; by now they were deeply involved, with great success, in the black market business, the normal, almost legitimate business of those times. Later, when they came home and saw me, theirs was also a matter-of-fact attitude. They asked about my mother and Evi and again I answered with the few simple words; " They did not come back." I said those words without letting their meaning form a picture in my mind. The words came out my mouth, but my mind was numb, empty of thoughts.

Today, however pictures do form in my mind. I see my mother and my sister, and I feel their panic and their embarrassment as they were ordered to undress and stand naked among strange men. Were they aware that they were entering a gas chamber? Or were they fooled into thinking that they were going into a shower room? How were the last minutes of their life? From the historians' account of the testimony of the few surviving men who worked in the crematoriums, we know today, that after the bodies were removed, there was human waste and blood in the gas chambers, revealing that the victims suffered unspeakably before they died. Did my parents and my sister, mercifully fall unconscious, in the first seconds as the gas was pumped into the room? Or were they trampled and struggling for air, suffocating under piles of dead people falling over them

? I agonize over this today. Those are the horrific pictures we now know about, pictures the world should know about and never forget!

The summer of 1945 was a time for me to gradually re-enter civilization.

A month had passed since my liberation, since I last drank the black coffee with brome in it, and a few days after my return home, I got my menstrual period. My body was starting to function normally, but it took much longer for my mind to adjust to normal life again.

I could not comprehend Ervin's insistence on buying some new dresses, coats and shoes for me. Why would I need all this? I only need one dress, one pair of shoes - just not to be naked. Food was what I felt I never had enough of. I would go into the pantry and finish a whole meal by myself, that our housekeeper had prepared for all of us.

Some time past before I ventured out of the apartment. When I finally did, I would go out in the mild summer mornings. The sun peeked through the leaves as I walked under the old shady trees. I passed by the houses, where people whom I used to know had lived before. Now they were gone; whole families had

disappeared. I passed the house of my Aunt Elza, my mother's younger sister. She, her husband, and their beautiful blonde little daughter Zsuzsika were gone; Auschwitz had swallowed them up.

Those walks were painful and confusing. The city looked the same, the familiar streets and houses. No bombs were dropped on this place, not one house was destroyed. The war did not leave its mark here, except on the Jewish community. Our people were gone; ninety-five (or more) percent of them. Marched into the gas chambers upon arrival in Auschwitz, never given a chance to survive. It seemed as if a vicious storm had swept away our people and turned the city into an orphanage for those of us, who came back.

But I walked the streets now without any fear that I was Jewish. There was no chasing, name calling, nor any display of antisemitism. I never felt so free of fear on these streets, not even before the Nazi occupation. I wondered: "Where have all those anti-Semites gone? With their centuries of hatred, where did they suddenly disappear?" With the Russians occupying Hungary, they did not dare to show their hatred. Only the expression on their faces would reveal their surprise and disappointment, that some Jews had come back.

As the weeks passed, I had less and less hope for the return of my father and younger brother. Still, I fantasized that one day the door will open and they will be coming through the doorway. I often went to the "Joint" (a Jewish organization) to see if by some miracle I could find their names on the survivors' list or maybe a message that someone knew of them.

One day, on my way to search among the messages, I met Mr. Wiszer, the principal of the Gymnasium, that I had attended. He recognized me and stopped to tell me that I did very well on the written part of my graduation exam. He said I should come and complete the oral part so that I could receive my diploma. I looked at him as if he would have spoken to me in a foreign language. Doesn't the world know what happened to us? Doesn't this man know where I was this past year? I wanted to tell him: I came back from a place, Auschwitz, where the tormenting hunger and cold, and the devastating fear of torture erased from my mind everything I had studied so hard. I wanted to tell him that having lived through Auschwitz, where there was no trace of civilization, a diploma can't mean anything to me anymore. I wanted to tell him all this, but he would never understand - only those who were there could understand - so I didn't utter a word. It took years,

until the time my first child started kindergarten, for me to want to pick up a book and read it.

Later, as our children were growing up, education once again became very important to us. I can proudly say today that our son, Ronald has a law degree and a Certified Public Accountant diploma. Our daughter, Audrey, is a real-estate attorney.

Slowly, I was getting used to my new life. Subconsciously trying to avoid everything that reminded me of my life before, it was not until the fall of 1945 that I first went back with Ervin to our house at Bocskai Street (Bocskai utca 24).The house was empty of our furniture; Russian soldiers had their offices there. As they let us in, I found the place, which once was my home completely strange to me, as if I had never lived there before. My mind refused to remember. For the next two and half years, while I lived in Nyiregyhaza I never went toward the direction of Bocskai Street again.

Throughout the summer, the boys and girls of our town who had survived Auschwitz, returned one by one. They were few in number and in most cases they were the only survivors of their entire family. Other survivors came to make their home in Nyiregyhaza, from neighboring smaller towns and the Sub-

Carpathian region of Hungary, which was annexed by Russia at the end of the war. By the fall, there was a lively young Jewish community in our city. A closeness, a feeling of camaraderie, developed among us, as if we were a big extended family. We were bonded together by our losses, by our past suffering, and by our desire to create a new life for ourselves.

This was a time - it lasted for a few years after our liberation - when everyone who survived the Nazi terror, was equal. A time absent of any social or class distinction. These were eliminated when rich and poor, educated and illiterate, observant, and non-religious were thrown together into the ghettos and cattle cars.

The young returnees often gathered in our apartment, where there was a homey atmosphere, where they always felt welcome. We ate together and we listened to American music on our newly purchased record player. I loved the forties' hit songs which conveyed to me a celebration of freedom, life, and romance.

We spent our time together, strolling through the city in the beautiful autumn evenings. There were smiles, laughter and cheerful talking, and never any mention of our life before the deportations, nor the horrors that followed. We enjoyed the present and talked about our future with newly found boundless enthusiasm for life. We talked about America, our dreamland, home

of our pure and heroic liberators, and hoped that in the not too distant future we would be able to go there. As young as we were, and without any guidance, we realized early on that we cannot stay in the country which had harmed us so much, which had robbed us of our families. From the very beginning we knew that we should not dwell on the past, rather we must devote ourselves to the future. We must have realized that it is our mission to create new families, to ensure Jewish continuity. We yearned for love and for family, and soon romances started, couples formed, and marriages took place. We were on our way to rebuilding our lives.

It was in September that I began to write a diary. It was my way of talking to and telling my sister Evi about the everyday happenings of my life, just as we used to in years past. I still have the diary, a small notebook, some of its pages now faded.

I wrote the first entry just before the High Holidays and in it I remind Evi how our father used to recite the blessings as he put his hands on the head of each of us children. And I tell Evi how much I miss them.

I wrote in my diary almost every day during my stay in Hungary, always addressing it to my sister as if she would be only temporarily away from home. And not once did I mention

Auschwitz or the Lager. Instead I wrote about boys whom I met, and what I thought of them and how I felt about them. I told Evi what we talked about and how thrilled I was when they showed interest in me, when I knew that they liked me. I wrote about many boys, whom I day-dreamed about for a few days and whom at the moment I thought I deeply loved. But these were innocent romances, because although we were young and a generation without parents, the moral values in which we were brought up stayed with us.

When I read the pages of my diary today, it is clear to me that I was searching for the one I could belong to forever. Through my diary I ran to Evi when I was happy, sad, or I felt hurt.

On April 17, 1946 I wrote: "Tonight I went for a walk with Tuli. We had a long and interesting conversation and I feel this will turn out to be more than a friendship."

Ours became the romance of our town, and I the envy of the girls in our city. There were many pretty girls who would have been happy to date Tuli, but he fell in love with me. His sisters were asking: "Why Agi?" (short for Agnes). I myself was wondering: Why me? He was tall, dark, handsome and while the other boys were in the illegal black market business, he was a partner in a legitimate

oil and gasoline business. But what I really liked about him was that I found him more serious than the others. In my eyes he was "older", - and I liked that-, although he was only twenty-four years old. I wrote in my diary; "Finally I met someone, who is mature after all those childish boys."

After that first stroll in the evening, Tuli and I saw each other every day. He lived around the corner from us with his four sisters and three cousins. (In those days cousins became brothers and sisters.) Later, we saw each other several times a day. We were in love and it was the purest, innocent love which made me feel secure and important. It made me forget the past, and not think about the future. But this idyllic time could not last long. Soon I realized that eventually we will have to part, probably forever. The thought of the goodbye loomed constantly in the back of my mind. It overshadowed the joy of the present and turned our courtship bittersweet.

By the end of 1946, Ervin and I, like most of the survivors, started to plan for our immigration to faraway, unknown places. Tuli was among the very few who did not want to leave Hungary. At least not yet. He did not want to leave his four sisters and he did not want to leave his prosperous business for uncertainty.

Meanwhile Communism was getting stronger and stronger in Hungary and to obtain a passport and visa was very difficult. Ervin and I, determined to leave, decided to cross over to Slovakia illegally and go on to Prague, the Czech capital, where there were more chances to get a visa to other countries.

I shudder today as I think back to our daringness. As we crossed the Slovak border, wading through the waist high water of a small river near the city of Ujhely, we were caught by the border guards. If not for some local Jews who - with connections at the police department -took us out of jail, we could have found ourselves deported to Siberia to die there, after surviving the Nazis.

How our life had changed! How we had changed! We had grown up so overly protected by our parents, and now we had the courage to do such daring things.

Being caught by the border guards did not deter us. After our release from jail we continued on to Prague. With the help of a Jewish guide we traveled by car from Ujhely to the Slovak city of Kassa, where we boarded a train, without having any permit papers to travel from Slovakia to the Czech Republic. We knew that the passengers' papers will be checked while we are in Slovak territory and that we will not be safe until we reach the

Czech border. We purchased our tickets for the sleeping compartment hoping that there the passengers won't be woken up to have their papers checked. Of course this was very naive thinking.

It was around midnight when I heard doors sliding open near our compartment. A few minutes later I heard the voices of soldiers in the compartment next to ours. And then the train stopped; we had reached the Czech border. I saw through the windows the Slovak soldiers leaving the train and the Czech officials boarding it. A whistle sounded, the train started out and I thanked G-d for saving us.

Spending a few weeks in Prague and not being able to get a visa to any country in the world we returned - crossing the border illegally - back to Hungary, back to Nyiregyhaza. How happy I was to see Tuli again! But Ervin and I, did not give up our plan to leave Hungary.

Our uncle Bizi, who immigrated to America with his family from Budapest after the war had ended, was now living in New York, and he sent us affidavits. So the possibility that we would be able to go to America became very real.

Tuli and I continued to see each other. I loved him too much to end our friendship although I no longer saw a future

together. But Tuli must have thought otherwise, because he would say to me: " How wonderful it will be, when we will be together forever, when I won't have to go home for the night, but we can stay together." And I wrote in my diary : " How does he want to accomplish this, when he knows that I will be leaving soon and yet he does not make a move to come with me?" But I was too proud to ask him this question. Our courtship became for me more bitter than sweet. The " tomorrow", our parting, was always present in my mind. He did not ask me to stay either. Was it because he did not want me to miss my chance to go to America? Today I wonder: What if he would have? Would I have listened to my heart and stayed or would I have been strong enough to follow my common sense not to?

Knowing that our goodbye was coming closer with every passing day, we spent as much time together as Tuli's business allowed. For hours we would stroll in the city and he constantly talked about our future so optimistically. I listened to him and wanted to believe his words, but my heart was aching.

It happened one Sunday afternoon on one of our leisurely walks not far from my apartment, that I saw a woman with a teenage girl coming toward us. I stopped abruptly, startled. I thought: Am I hallucinating? The girl looks like me and the woman

looks like my mother. The two of them were wearing our winter coats. Just then as they passed by us, I cried out loud. "These are our winter coats! My mother's and mine!" Tuli and I turned. I wanted to tear those coats off of them. But the two were already running and they darted across the street into a nearby church. We ran after them up the steps of the church, but at the entrance we stopped. We could not bring ourselves to burst into a church; it was not the place to make a commotion. Or perhaps we were still afraid that the Gentiles inside will all turn against us? We waited at the entrance for hours naively thinking that eventually they will have to emerge. But the church must have had a back door, because they never came out. I did not have a chance to confront these people, to get to know who these grave plunderers were. I wanted to get back our coats, not because I needed them - I had a new one - but because I did not want that woman to wear my mother's coat.

Fearing that the Communists will soon close the borders, more and more of the young survivors left Hungary. They went to all corners of the world: Countries in Western Europe, Palestine, South America, Australia, America, Canada, wherever they were let in.

Ilonka remarried and was living in London, England. Her brother David followed her. Ervin met a girl, Hedy Klein, - now his wife - in Prague and spent many weeks there crossing the border illegally back and forth. Each time he left, I was dreadfully worried about him. Matyu and I stayed in Nyiregyhaza and our housekeeper stayed with us, although we no longer had money to pay her. In fact there was little money for food or for heating fuel either. But these things did not concern me: only the approaching goodbye from Tuli made me very sad.

Ervin and I were proceeding with our immigration to America. It was going slowly but with definite progress. In the beginning of 1948 we received our Hungarian passports, and then the notice for an interview at the American Embassy arrived.

It was an unforgettable moment, a dream come true, when the precious, so difficult to obtain American visas were stamped into our passports. I was extremely happy and heartbroken at the same time. Once again I will be separated as it looked, forever, from the one who meant so much to me. Will I always have to part from the ones who are the most important people in my life?

Tuli came to Budapest and accompanied us to the train station to say goodbye. He still talked about the future, when we will be together forever. I felt I was choking as I swallowed my

tears; I did not want him to see them. Only when the train had left and as I was waving to him did I allow the tears of my aching heart to flow freely. I was sure I will never see Tuli again. Hungary was on the verge of falling behind the Iron Curtain, its borders being sealed and immigration prohibited.

Ervin and I traveled to Prague - this time legally, with all the necessary papers - then on to England. In London, we visited Ilonka who had just given birth to a new baby boy. In Southampton we boarded the ship, the SS Washington, to take us to America. After five days of seasickness we arrived in New York on March 18, 1948. Our Uncle Bizi was waiting for us at the harbor and handed me more than a dozen letters from Tuli. Already in the very first letter he asked me to try to get him an affidavit, so that he could start to work on his immigration papers.

CHAPTER NINE.

I loved America the minute I stepped down on its shores. Although, Ervin and I spent the first two weeks in Ellis Island, even being in a detention center did not seem bad as long it was in America.

I loved America, although things were not as I had imagined. I imagined that in America everything is new and shiny. I pictured that Ervin and I will rent a small apartment in a modern skyscraper, with lots of huge windows letting in the sunshine. Instead, on leaving Ellis Island, we moved in with my Uncle, Aunt and their four sons in a two bedroom apartment in a small walk-up building in an old, dilapidated neighborhood of Williamsburg. This is not to complain about my Uncle and Aunt. They were the most wonderful people to us.

Six weeks later Ervin and I rented a basement furnished room. When I looked out the window, I only saw the legs of the people passing by and I heard their conversation, which might as well have been Chinese, since I did not know a word of English. Jobs were hard to find because of the many refugees. It was especially hard for those of us who had no skill in any trade. But our hopes for the future and our ambition to succeed were strong. When I first started working in a clothing factory I did not even know how to thread the sewing machine. After two days I was fired but I had learned fast and at my second job, I already passed as an "experienced" seamstress. Among the many new experiences, I found it strange, that everyone was so secretive about where they worked or how much their salary was. We were eager to learn about the American way of life, but nobody was willing to teach us. Still, we were in a free country, where we did not have to fear persecution, and we were thankful for it.

A few months after our arrival in New York, Ervin moved to Cleveland where job possibilities were somewhat better. To share the rent, I found a roommate, Edith Rappaport, also a Holocaust survivor who had just arrived in America. Edith was an intelligent, very lively girl with whom I soon became best

friends. We did everything together: Looking for jobs, going to movies, exploring the city of New York. She spoke English pretty well while I had only learned a few words. Edith, with her outgoing, cheerful personality, eased the anxious times while I was longing for Tuli, not knowing whether he will be able to come to America. Tuli and I wrote to each other every day, in fact twice a day. The hundreds of letters (which we still have) were full of dreams of the future.

But Tuli was a world apart from me and it seemed, that the political forces will keep us apart forever. I longed to hear his voice for reassurance, but Hungary had become a Communist country, and a telephone call from America would have been dangerous for him. His letters took many days to arrive and I often thought: Did he meet someone else, from the time he wrote in his last letter how much he misses me, how much he loves me?

It was so long since I had last seen him, heard his voice. I often felt that an impassable ocean separates us, or that there is a wall reaching to the sky that we could never climb over. I had sent him the necessary papers for his immigration , but to obtain a passport was very difficult. And to receive an exit visa from Communist Hungary did not seem possible.

A year went by with desperate hopes, frequent despair, and lots of prayers until in March, 1949 I received a telegram from Tuli saying that he was granted an exit visa. He was among the last ones to leave Hungary legally.

On April 8, as I waited with nervous anticipation for his ship to arrive at the New York Harbor, thoughts raced through my mind. Will we recognize each other? Did he change? Did I change? Are we going to have the same feelings for each other as when we parted? Later he told me that he also had the same thoughts, the same doubts as I, but when we saw each other all these doubtful thoughts disappeared. We were married two weeks later, on April 26, 1949 and our life in our new country began. A country where we had no roots, no identity, where no one knew who we were before. For many years we, survivors, were referred to as "Greeners", not a flattering remark. We were grateful to our new country even though we were looked upon as uneducated people who had come from some barbaric place, since we ill-pronounced, and poorly used the grammar of our new language. And so our life became split: "Before and after." Before Auschwitz and after Auschwitz. Then, and even today, when we talk about our memories of our younger years, we use these words:

"Before" and "After." And in between those two words stays the shadow of Auschwitz forever.

Fifty years after our liberation, (Tuli was also imprisoned in a German concentration camp) we returned to Auschwitz. All these years I believed that Auschwitz was in a G-d forsaken, uninhabited part of the earth. But we had traveled only a few hours by car from Warsaw when we already saw on the road-signs that we are coming close to "Oswiecim: (Auschwitz, in Polish). I was shaken and shocked to see that although we are nearing Auschwitz, we are still passing through small towns and villages. It was a Sunday morning; the church bells were ringing and families with children were going to church just a few kilometers away from the place where once human beings by the hundreds of thousands were tortured beyond description, where they were gassed and burned. The people in those nearby towns must have known what was going on so close to them! They must have seen the fires and smelled the odor of the burning flesh, carried by the wind. Were these church bells also ringing so peacefully and festively fifty years ago? Were these people going to church with their smiling children playfully hopping on the road, while our parents and children were burning in the crematorium? The smell will linger on and the

screams of the victims will forever echo over this cursed part of the world, where all that barbarism was committed, so close to civilization.

EPILOGUE.

A few years ago, we took our young grandchildren to an "Uncle Moshie" Chanukah concert. The huge auditorium of a nearby high school was packed with excited, happy little Jewish children, the majority of them grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. It was a triumphant feeling a great feeling of satisfaction to see the hundreds of children and to listen as they were clapping enthusiastically at "Uncle Moishe's" magic acts. We felt a victory over Hitler as we heard them sing the Hebrew songs with the performer.

So while Hitler's territorial war, to realize his imperialist dream for Germany, was crushed on the battlefields by the Allied forces and the Russian army, his carefully planned war against the Jews, with the aim of total annihilation of the Jewish people, was defeated by those of us who by luck

survived his inferno. Emerging from the depth of the death camps, we did not waste our energy on revenge, instead we concentrated on rebuilding our shattered lives. We created new families, named our children (and they, their children) after our parents, sisters and brothers, and taught them the traditions of their martyred ancestors. And with that, the determination of Hitler and his collaborators to systematically wipe out the Jewish people and their culture was defeated, with the Almighty on our side.

USHMM LIBRARY



01 0001 0128 8255